



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
School of Journalism
and Mass Communication



Innovative Collaboration in the Public Interest

The media industries today confront a wide array of economic, geographical, and technological changes in both the infrastructures and the institutions of mass communication — newspapers moving to web sites and mobile devices, advertisers moving to search engines and social networks, and audiences fragmenting their media exposure across the worlds of print, broadcast, and digital. Many media scholars believe that **these changes pose the greatest threat to the future of local and regional investigative reporting** — one of the most expensive forms of news-gathering in the public interest, but also one of the most crucial for a well-informed citizenry and workforce.

To respond to this crisis in journalism, the **School of Journalism and Mass Communication at UW-Madison** entered into an innovative collaboration with our colleagues at **Wisconsin Public Broadcasting** and a new non-profit and non-partisan professional investigative news organization, **the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism**. SJMC houses the WCIJ, and the WCIJ provides paid internships for SJMC students.



WCIJ director Andy Hall and SJMC student interns

In only three short years, this award-winning collaboration has resulted in a dramatic increase in the quality and quantity of both investigative reporting and public-interest data that is available to the people and businesses of Wisconsin. More importantly, this valuable information is made available not only through a central website, but through the **free distribution of high-quality investigative news reports** to private for-profit and non-profit news outlets across both the state of Wisconsin and the country at large.

How do SJMC and WCIJ collaborate?

- **SJMC and WCIJ support the Wisconsin Idea.** The SJMC mission to “contribute to the health of society, democracy and the economy by advancing understanding of the mass media central to all three, and by producing graduates equipped to study and understand those media, using them constructively to inform and persuade,” directly links to the WCIJ mission to “Protect the vulnerable. Expose wrongdoing. Seek solutions to problems.” In the work we do together, we advance the Wisconsin Idea, or “the principle that the university should improve people’s lives beyond the classroom.”
- **WCIJ provides paid internships** to UW-Madison students to work on real investigative reporting projects with seasoned professionals. These interns see their work reach thousands of readers across the state, and often win professional awards in doing so. Past interns work with news organizations around the state, the nation, and the world.
- **SJMC provides two small offices** to the WCIJ during the school year, housing both their staff and our student interns on the 5th floor of Vilas Hall. (A third room is provided seasonally for summer interns.) This proximity ensures that both the WCIJ journalists and our students, staff, and faculty have easy and regular contact in and out of the classroom.
- **SJMC collaboration with WCIJ supports our research, teaching, and service** in ventures such as our one-credit internship course, our annual national conference on Journalism Ethics, and our innovative in-house hyperlocal journalism project, Madison Commons.
- **SJMC and WCIJ share expertise** and opportunities for collaboration with SJMC Professor Emeritus Jack Mitchell serving as secretary of the WCIJ Board of Directors, and WCIJ Director Andy Hall serving as a “zero dollar” Honorary Associate/Fellow in SJMC. And Pulitzer Prize-winning SJMC Professor Deborah Blum regularly brings her investigative reporting class into collaboration with WCIJ professional journalists and projects.

What results has this collaboration yielded so far?

- **SJMC and WCIJ shared The Associated Press Media Editors’ first ever Innovator of the Year for College Students Award** in Fall 2012. “This is a smart and innovative way for a journalism school to lead investigative reporting,” the APME judges said.
- **SJMC placed nearly two dozen paid interns** with WCIJ, winning local and state awards for their reporting from the Milwaukee Press Club and Investigative Reporters & Editors.
- **WCIJ produced and distributed more than 65 major reports** on topics such as the growing reliance on immigrants by the state’s dairy industry; barriers to treatment for mothers suffering from perinatal depression; the rising numbers of low-income students in Wisconsin schools; the role of DNA testing in proving the innocence of a dozen Wisconsin prisoners; and the underreporting of sexual assaults on Wisconsin campuses.
- **WCIJ reporting reached 18 million readers** through more than 150 news organizations including Wisconsin Public Radio, The New York Times, The Capital Times, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Wisconsin State Journal, Green Bay Press-Gazette, Oshkosh Northwestern, La Crosse Tribune, Eau Claire Leader Telegram, The Country Today, WBAY-ABC in Green Bay, Hudson Star-Observer, Janesville Gazette, and La Comunidad.