



Building a Bridge Between the Knight News Challenge and JMC Programs:  
Bringing the Ideas to Life in JMC Classrooms and Student Media

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### **Capstone Students Using Ushahidi and Mobile Media Toolkit to Train New Generation of Black Press**

Using Ushahidi and create a mobile media toolkit, students in the senior-level capstone courses at Howard University would be trained to train the Black press to incorporate crowdsourcing and mobile reporting techniques to supplement news coverage and increase user engagement at Black newspapers. Two award-winning campus media outlets, The Hilltop and the Howard University News Service (HUNewsService.com), would collaborate to develop more resources for Black newspapers. The student-run newspaper, The Hilltop, covers student interests, and the Howard University News Service covers the eight wards of Washington, D.C., and the metropolitan region.

Howard University plans to use Ushahidi and Mobile Media Toolkit to become a source of talent, training and resources to help the Black press enhance its online presence. As part of the course, the students would receive course credit to help these newspapers develop content for their websites with a focus on hyper-local reporting and community journalism. In addition, Howard University News Service would become the hub of learning for the Black press and other ethnic news organizations that want to learn new techniques to engage their communities and deliver much-needed news and information using mobile platforms.

The pilot program would be launched with a Howard University faculty member who would train advanced journalism students to work closely with two local Black newspapers in the Washington metro area. The next year, Howard students would train students at five other historically Black universities to work with their local Black newspapers. Universities that seek to join the program must submit a formal proposal, detailing why they should be selected and what they will do to strengthen the partnership. In year three, the program would be expanded to all HBCUs with schools of journalism

or communications. In that year, Howard University News Service would develop a mobile app and a separate college channel on its site featuring the news from students and citizen journalists from around the country.

The newspapers would use Ushahidi to help fill the gap in news reporting by creating a database that journalists and citizens can use to contribute interactive news and information geared to the audiences of member newspapers.

Like other news organizations, the legacy Black press is grappling with the disruptive force of the Internet. The National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) is the major trade association and news service for Black newspaper publishers. Most of the papers are weeklies with little to no web presence and few resources.

This disruption has pressed many of them to the brink of losing control and market share because of budgetary and staffing cutbacks that have resulted in a lack of quantity, quality and access to information at the community level. These organizations are now competing with smaller, more nimble bloggers and community websites with low overhead.

Howard University News Service and The Hilltop are in the unique position to take advantage of this period in which new technology and training have become accessible, allowing almost anyone to become a journalist. This project would be an important resource that would allow newspapers to master new media resources. The project advances the First Amendment and provides a direction that newspapers can follow to upgrade their body of knowledge, take advantage of available resources, and learn to use social media, citizen journalism tools and multimedia to increase readership, particularly among younger readers.

### **The Benefit to Howard University Students**

This project contributes to our efforts at Howard to develop “leadership for America and the global community.” The goals are consistent with the historical mission of the Department of Journalism and the John H. Johnson School of Communications to provide academic and professional training in journalism for a culturally diverse population. As assistant professor – new media, I have been charged with applying new media technology and research to train a new generation – the digital natives -- in how use new media in areas that impact the dissemination of information and the media's depiction of various cultures.

This project will:

- Contribute to strengthening democracy and Black communities by helping to strengthen the Black press
- Leverage Howard as a source of training among historically Black colleges and universities
- Position the Department of Journalism and the Black newspapers as a model for use of open-source software to inform African-American communities
- Increase the visibility of the technology development of the University and develop

technology partners

- Increase access to technology at free or cost-effective levels

### **Significance**

Many Black newspapers are located in news deserts, which lack adequate coverage of issues that affect African-American readers. The students would focus on a few topics that may be of common interest to Black readers such as local politics, education, health, personal finance/small business, spirituality, crime and justice, and technology. The project will rely on citizen journalists to help supplement the lack of news and information in news deserts, such as Ward 8 of Washington, which has traditionally received uneven attention from mainstream news organizations. With the expansion of the project, it would also include news deserts such as New Orleans, which is losing a valuable news source as the Times Picayune pulls back and few alternatives have evolved. The citizen journalists would learn to report using short news messages on inexpensive mobile devices as well as video and audio for more feature-laden mobile devices.

The 200 Black newspapers of NNPA's Black Press USA are mainly weekly newspapers with more than half having no web presence or limited web presence and most with stagnant circulation and weak advertising. Many of the newspapers are family-owned endeavors run by baby boomers or older members with little experience with technology. A few are starting to incorporate new media technologies that can improve community engagement. But most lack resources in expertise or funding.

### **The Benefit to Black Newspapers**

- Increase access to technology at free or cost-effective levels
- Help the media organizations to lower production costs, lower technology costs and increase market share
- Help meet the market demands of youth and technology-centered consumers
- Increase awareness about the role, value and the historical and present-day importance of the Black press in America
- Strengthen the pipeline of talent with digital capabilities
- Increase the reach of the Black press

**Assessment and Evaluation** The project would be assessed and evaluated using monthly reports and report summaries from Google analytics detailing increases in traffic from improved content. A report using web usability standards would assess the quality of the websites developed for the participating newspapers. Use of SEO and social media optimization tools would offer insights into the success of the project.

- Success would also be assessed according to the number of articles that are written about the project.
- The project would also incorporate Facebook and Twitter analytics to detail success of the project.
- The project would also offer a profile of the citizen journalists and links to their work as an evaluation tool.

- Success would also be assessed according to how much these newspapers will be able to do on their own once the students graduate.
- Success would also be assessed according to the job placement of the students who participate in the training program.

**Timeline**

July 2013 – Train instructors for Capstone class in Ushahidi and Mobile Media Toolkit

July 2013 -- Assess needs and establish relationship with two participating newspapers

July 2013 Build out site, develop materials, set calendar for fall training, develop syllabus; set up assessment tools

August-September – Hold boot camp to train students in technology

September – set schedule and location to train representatives from two newspapers

September 2013 – Outreach to citizen journalists for crowdsourced content

January 2013 – Interim assessment

May 2013 – End of year assessment of project



September 10, 2012

To Whom it May Concern:

I am pleased to write in support of the proposal by Assistant Professor Ingrid Sturgis, of the Howard University Department of Journalism, for a project that, if funded, will contribute to training students in new technology and endowing the black press with the capacity to harness the power of digital technology to assure that black voices are heard in the cacophony created by easy access to inexpensive mobile devices.

The proposal emphasizes commitment to a free and responsible press, leadership in experiential learning, creative applications of new media technology and research into how news media depict distinct cultures around the globe. Professor Sturgis' proposal is in total alignment with the goals and focus of the Department of Journalism.

Why is sustaining the black press important? For the very same reason that the founders of Freedom's Journal justified publishing the first African American-run newspaper in 1827:

*We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the publick been deceived by misrepresentations in things which concern us dearly, though in the estimation of some mere trifles; for though there are many in society who exercise towards us benevolent feelings; still (with sorrow we confess it) there are others who make it their business to enlarge upon the least trifle, which tends to the discredit of any person of colour; and pronounce anathemas and denounce our whole body for the misconduct of this guilty one.*

In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, media literacy has not blossomed at the same rate as the blossoming of digital technology, and there remains a need for news media devoted to news and information of special importance to African Americans – as much today as in 1827. And, despite their best intentions, the black press is still playing technological catch-up.

Prof. Sturgis' research proposal points the way toward pursuit of answers that will help to close the gap. I urge you to give it your best consideration.

Sincerely,

*Charles Fancher*

Assistant Chairman  
Department of Journalism