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NEWS

California Community News Awarded $250K to Grow Student Reporting

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CALIFORNIA (MPG) - To support student community reporting, the Lumina Foundation announced a $150,000 investment to expand access to student reporting across the 22-campus California State University (CSU) system. The Center for Community News at UVM, which is spearheading the effort, has committed an additional $100,000 to the program.

“Higher education is an important partner in building stronger, more connected communities,” said Stephanie Wang, senior editor at Lumina Foundation. “Student reporting programs like CSU's help students gain valuable hands-on experience while giving residents deeper insight into the local issues and decisions shaping their lives.”

California Community News (CA-CCN) was established in 2025 with the help of the national Center for Community News to provide students across the CSU system with opportunities to hone journalism skills, report on their communities, and strengthen local news systems (see story here). The long-term goal of the program is to expand beyond CSU institutions to community colleges and other schools to increase community coverage and opportunities for more California student reporters.

“These investments go a long way toward supporting and training student journalists, while ensuring that communities all over California have access to local news that keeps them informed and provides a reliable source of civic information,” said Gina Baleria, associate professor of media at Sonoma State University and coordinator of the CA-CCN. “In the wake of the loss of so much local news coverage in recent years, the success of this project is critical.”

The CA-CCN is part of an effort to provide more community-engaged and experiential learning opportunities for students across the country in journalism, communications, and related fields. Under the direction of faculty and professional editors, students produce original multimedia reporting for local news partners.

“Our students know the people and issues in their communities – so they often find exclusive stories and cover public issues that really matter to residents,” said Julie Patel Liss, a CA-CCN consultant and head of Cal State LA’s journalism program. “By helping fill news gaps in local communities, our students have an opportunity to do hands-on public service journalism and provide fact-checked, well-sourced information to local residents and the professional newsrooms we partner with. It's a win-win for the students, their local communities, and our newsroom partners.”

This endeavor is part of an emerging national movement of schools forging a sustainable future for local news through student-led reporting. Abundant research demonstrates that local news is critical to a thriving democracy. The presence of local news contributes to higher civic engagement, government accountability, and social cohesion. Yet more than 80 million Americans live in news deserts. In California alone, more than 12,000 local journalists have lost their jobs since 2002, according to the nonpartisan/nonprofit Rebuild Local News coalition.

“Those 12,000 lost jobs aren't just a statistic. They're city council meetings no one covers and school board decisions no one explains,” said Thomas Corrigan, professor of Communication and Media at Cal State San Bernardino and a CCN Faculty Champion. “Student reporting programs can't replace professional newsrooms, but – alongside public and private initiatives – they can help support and grow local news infrastructures. We're training the next generation of journalists in the communities where they live, providing partner newsrooms more capacity, and creating pipelines of talented reporters ready to step into local news jobs.”

Funds will go to hire editors to assist faculty who mentor student reporters. The Center for Community News is providing additional funds for faculty leaders through their Faculty Champions program and to hire state and regional coordinators to support the community of faculty leaders.

“Passionate faculty members are the lifeblood of university-led reporting programs,” said CCN Director Richard Watts. “We are pleased to support their leadership in creating more opportunities for students and helping with local news infrastructure.”

The CSU system is the largest four-year university system in the U.S. with 22 campuses and more than 450,000 students. The individual campuses that make up the CSU system have the potential to be national

leaders with their news-academic programs, ensuring access to local information in underserved communities, shoring up civic infrastructure and advancing the sustainability of California’s information ecosystem.

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