



UNIVERSITY OF
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**CONVERSATION WITH CNS MANAGING DIRECTOR MARTY KAISER
AND BUREAU CHIEFS ADAM MARTON AND ALEXANDER PYLES RE:
THE HOWARD CENTER'S FOUNDATIONAL COLLABORATION**

In this informative session Capital News Service's (CNS) Managing Director, Marty Kaiser and bureau chiefs Adam Marton and Alexander Pyles explained how the Howard Center's foundational collaborations work and why a multidisciplinary journalism education combined with real world journalism experiences produces highly skilled graduates. Along with explanations from these experts, students showed how they did the work to enhance and amplify the Center's investigative projects. Further, Managing Director Kaiser and Lecturer Jerry Zremski offered an inside look at the first statewide project from Merrill's new Local News Network.



**MARTY KAISER - MANAGING DIRECTOR
CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE**

"From what I have seen, the students who come out of the Howard Center are already ahead of the news folks I've seen with a couple years of experience in the newsrooms. They have been taught great things and are doing incredibly powerful stories."

As Managing Director Kaiser explained to our group, Capital News Service “is a student-powered news organization run by Merrill College,” that is “dedicated to covering issues of import to Marylanders.” In collaboration with the Howard Center, CNS “covers breaking news, in-depth investigative and enterprise journalism” focused primarily on the needs of the State of Maryland’s constituents.



**ADAM MARTON – DIGITAL BUREAU CHIEF FOR
CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE**

Bureau Chief Adam Marton teaches data, coding and graphic design at Merrill, in addition to running the Data and Graphics Bureau. Marton’s Bureau looks to tell stories in new and different ways, not through words, but by focusing on digital storytelling and unearthing stories from mined data. His team looks at large and small data sets to find outliers in collected information and then uses the outliers as a “springboard for more traditional reporting.” Marton works with his students to identify “stories that other people might not be aware of” and tell those stories “in ways that are... visual, using graphics, code, computational journalism and new creative coding methods to help attract readers online.” He explains, “people now don’t often want to read long stories, at least that is what the numbers have been telling [him] for the last 20 years.”

How CNS Students Interact with the Howard Center

According to Marton, a great example of how the Bureau collaborates with the Howard Center is the “Printing Hate” project, completed in 2021. The award-winning investigative piece contains a series of stories that looks at “how the media helped propagate hatred against black people” and “dives into the responsibility that [journalists] have for the way black people have been treated in this country.” For Marton, it was “a really powerful project.”

Within the project, Marton’s team had to figure out how they could help tell the same story the Howard Center reporters were telling “but in a visual way.” That meant creating the identity for the site, building “a beautiful website that makes people want to read the story,” helping tell the story and “tying all of that together with what we call a “contextual design.” It was a huge project, made easier by his “extraordinarily talented students.”

How Marton's Team Works

During the semester, Marton's team works with the Howard Center on projects like "Printing Hate." Once the school year ends, he "run[s] a team over the summer to help continue the work," so the project never has to be suspended due to the university's academic school year. To "supplement the [investigative] writing," for "Printing Hate," the students analyzed data, shot photos, recorded audio, created static and motion graphics, designed a website and built a news application that allows people to "explore historical lynching coverage by approximately 100 newspapers that still exist in some form today."

Marton recognized from the beginning that due to the magnitude of the story, "traditional info graphics," like "using traditional charts and maps" wasn't enough. "They just didn't have the emotional impact that we wanted." So, his team designed motion graphics and helped create "what students call a "mini documentary" that features Deneen Brown, a UMD professor, whom Marton referred to as "the catalyst behind the project."

Click [here](#) to learn more about the Printing Hate project.



**ALEXANDER PYLES – AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT
BUREAU CHIEF FOR CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE**

Alexander Pyles and his team use metrics, social media and other digital storytelling tools to maximize audience engagement for projects published by CNS and the Howard Center.

Audience Engagement Bureau – What We Do

During his presentation, Pyles explained that his team works "primarily as digital editors and audience engagement strategists, developing newsletters, creating social media content, analyzing digital metrics and formulating publishing strategies."

Pyles believes that "rather than use a specific tool and say this is how we teach here," it is more important for him to "try to teach a mindset." Audience Engagement analyzes research trying to determine where the audience is for the various projects or stories that are being published. They do a lot of "sourcing and verification." According to Pyles, social media is only 20% promotion,

the rest is listening to find out what an audience needs with the goal of “helping them better understand their world and build trust.” Pyles generates story ideas for listening. “We do engagement and promotion and try to interact with users in different online communities,” then the team promotes the work they do, and “translates the journalism being produced into snippets or content that is appropriate for whatever platform [they] are targeting.” They look for demographic data and measure the effectiveness of everything they do. According to Pyles, “none of this is useful if we don’t know if it works.”

In summarizing his bureau’s work, Pyles explained, “we jump in at the end to figure out how we can deliver [reporting] to people in a way that ensures that all of the hard work that Jerry Zremski and his reporting students put into it actually gets all the recognition it deserves.”

Presentation by Audience Engagement Bureau Students

Following his presentation, Pyles introduced us to several students currently working for his Audience Engagement Bureau. Each student, in their own words, explained how they collaborate and run the social strategy to support CNS and Howard Center investigative reporting. Their audience engagement has proven extremely successful. As a team they decide on: (a) constructing preliminary research to analyze audiences; (b) content calendars and strategies to hit every intended audience; (c) how to best use social media (e.g., Tik Tok, Facebook and Instagram); (d) whom to prioritize on social media, including research to pinpoint target audiences; and (e) the best ways to create content for audience interests. To assess their success, the team compares web views to engagement rates and uses social referral rates to show the impact of their social media strategy on the project. The students explained, high audience engagement means “the more people feel like they can interact with the content, the more they will want to read it.”



JERRY ZREMSKI – LOCAL NEWS NETWORK LEADER

“I think what the Howard Center has done over the last years has just been amazing journalism of the highest quality. I feel blessed that I now have the opportunity to create something a little different for the younger students. For the students who will go to the Howard Center in a year or so, and that something we created is the Local News Network.”

Jerry Zremski leads the Local News Network. The Network is a new addition to the Merrill College portfolio. According to Zremeski, the Network “is really all about bolstering the local news ecosystem of the state of Maryland.” Zremeski explained, because local news is facing incredible economic challenges these days, the Network’s purpose is to “find ways in which we can both help our students and help the local news ecosystem of the State” at the same time.

Analyzing where the Local News Network's work should begin, Zremski and his students created innovative surveys to assess where local news editors and directors' needs overlap with the new Network's resources. During his presentation, Zremski gave us a candid explanation of the project his team is currently working on. Although we cannot summarize it in our report, we can say Zremski feels like "it's an incredible project... that really exceeded [his] expectations in terms of reach." Before he wrapped up his presentation, he also shared with us his thoughts on Kathy Best, the Director of the Howard Center at UMD. According to Zremski, he was part of the search committee to select the Director of the Howard Center, and although he didn't know Kathy Best well, he knew of her reputation and the awards she had won. With sincere enthusiasm, Zremeski added, "oh my God, [Kathy Best] has exceeded all of the expectations. She is a joy to work with. "The collaboration wouldn't happen inside or around the country without her. It is just remarkable. She gets everyone to work together." Zremeski, is "extremely proud of all [they] are doing at Capital News Service" in collaboration with Best.