



# CENTER FOR MEDIA INNOVATION

## Point Park University

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### Center for Media Innovation at Point Park University announces six finalists for \$20,000 media fellowship

**PITTSBURGH, PA** – The Center for Media Innovation at Point Park University is proud to announce the six finalists for the \$20,000 Doris O’Donnell Innovations in Investigative Journalism Fellowship.

“In the first year of this fellowship, our goals were simple – to attract a wide-ranging and diverse set of submissions from all around the country that would highlight stories not otherwise being told,” said Andrew Conte, director of the Center for Media Innovation. “I could not be happier with the results. The six finalists have presented plans to tell ambitious, important stories from Alaska to right here in Pittsburgh.”

The annual fellowship is made possible through a three-year grant from the Allegheny Foundation. With the number of underserved markets – known as news deserts – growing throughout the United States, the fellowship is just the latest effort from the Center designed to spotlight and take on the problem.



**DORIS O'DONNELL**  
INNOVATIONS IN INVESTIGATIVE  
JOURNALISM FELLOWSHIP

Finalists for the Doris O’Donnell fellowship are:

**Sergio Chapa, Reporter, Houston Chronicle.** Chapa, who covers the oil and gas industry for the paper, has been collecting data on a recent spate of earthquakes in Texas that appear related to areas of intense drilling and fracking, and related wastewater disposal activity in the Permian Basin and the Eagle Ford. These earthquakes are occurring in rural areas that have become news deserts. Chapa has proposed a regional media alliance, and hopes to investigate whether Texas regulators have done enough to protect people in those areas from potentially devastating earthquakes.

**Douglas Fischer, Executive Director, Environmental Health Sciences,** Bozeman, Mont. Fischer believes reporting on climate-related environmental injustice in rural Virginia and the North Carolina coasts could be tremendously consequential. The region is home to the largest population of color at risk of a catastrophic storm outside of New Orleans. Most coastal counties have one or even zero newspapers, and newspaper circulation in both states is rapidly decreasing. Fischer’s group would partner with social justice nonprofit Virginia Organizing on a project that would propose a solutions-oriented approach to calling out pressing environmental justice issues.

**Erica Hensley, Health/Data Reporter and Knight Foundation Fellow, Mississippi Today.** Hensley proposes a project that would examine how Mississippi handles the threat of lead poisoning by comparing data from state and nonprofit targeted high-risk areas and intervention strategies. Testing and data is sparse and uncoordinated. The project would take its resulting analysis and apply it to determining what interventions in communities would work to mitigate risk of lead exposure. These communities are under-covered by news outlets, the people there are underinsured and not well-served by environmental protection agencies because of the unique nature of lead poisoning.

**Nick Keppler, Freelance Journalist and Editor, Pittsburgh.** Alaska's Kodiak Island – population 13,592 – might be the world's most inflated illegal drug market. Single busts there have confiscated millions of dollars in drugs, and one indictment from 2016 shows a complex criminal organization extending outside Alaska to distribute on the island. The 24-officer police department is struggling to keep up with hundreds of drug arrests and other related crimes. Meanwhile, the nearest drug treatment facilities are on the mainland. Keppler has secured interest from Vice, should he be able to report the story.

**Maria Rose, Morning Edition Producer for NPR and WESA-FM, Pittsburgh.** The 600-person town of Wasau, Neb., was devastated in the spring when the Missouri River crested at 26 feet and caused massive floods. Now, with farmland and homes destroyed, some residents are reluctantly contemplating relocation. Most media attention around climate change-induced disaster trends toward coastal cities, but experts predict Midwestern floods will increase in frequency and power. Rose would like to examine the long-term impacts of Midwestern flooding and how the situation exemplifies larger-scale climate migration.

**Matt Stroud, CEO and Executive Editor, Postindustrial Media, Pittsburgh.** Postindustrial has produced an exclusive database of all criminal and civil charges filed in Pennsylvania in 2017 and 2018. The database sheds light not only on how police use an extraordinarily broad set of statutes to carry out arrests but also how these arrests are carried out without any public oversight in the state's many news deserts, including two counties that lack daily newspapers. His plan would be to run a yearlong series of stories that will highlight unreported aspects to these arrests and shed light on specific prosecutorial tactics relating to them.

The winner will be announced Tuesday, Sept. 10, during an event at the Center for Media Innovation. The selected journalist will have six months to produce and publish or broadcast the final story or series of stories. In addition, the honoree will be required to come to Point Park University's Downtown Pittsburgh campus three times, which includes an event to celebrate their work.

A panel of five distinguished judges with credentials in innovative and investigative journalism will evaluate applicants based on value, innovation, engagement, diversity and ability.

"I'm grateful for the wisdom and enthusiasm of our judging panel, who diligently pored over a number of terrific applications to give us a worthy final six," Conte said.

That judging panel includes:

- **Penny Abernathy**, a former executive at The Wall Street Journal and New York Times who is now the Knight Chair in Journalism and Digital Media Economics at the University of North

Carolina. She is the author of “The Expanding News Deserts,” a major 2018 report that documents the decline and loss of local news organizations in the U.S.

- **David Folkenflik**, a media correspondent for NPR News, and host and editor of On Point from NPR and WBUR, Boston’s NPR station. His stories and analyses are broadcast throughout NPR’s newsmagazines, including All Things Considered, Morning Edition, and Here & Now.
- **Amber Hunt**, an investigative reporter for the Cincinnati Enquirer. She is part of the Pulitzer Prize-winning team at the Enquirer, where she also hosts the podcast “Accused,” an award-winning true crime serial that reached No. 1 on iTunes and has 20 million downloads to date. She’s written six books, including the New York Times bestseller “The Kennedy Wives.”
- **Brentin Mock**, a Pittsburgh-based staff writer for CityLab, a standalone website from The Atlantic that explores trends shaping our country’s urban future, and captures the creativity and vibrancy of our increasingly urbanized world.
- **Carl Prine**, editor of the Navy Times, who covered the invasion of Iraq for the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review and was later deployed to Iraq as an Army guardsman. Prior to the Navy Times, he covered the military beat and breaking national news at the San Diego Union-Tribune. In 2012, Prine won an Investigative Reporters and Editors Award for “Rules of Engagement,” a report on a 2007 incident in which U.S. soldiers shot three unarmed deaf Iraqi boys.

For more information on the fellowship, go to [www.DorisODonnellFellowship.com](http://www.DorisODonnellFellowship.com).

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*The Center for Media Innovation at Point Park University is a state-of-the-art incubator and collaborative space designed to prepare students for success in a media industry intertwined with the latest technology, while also supporting professional journalists and educating the public at large. The Center features TV and radio/podcast studios, a photo studio, a multimedia newsroom, and a transformational presentation and gallery space. Visit [CenterForMediaInnovation.com](http://CenterForMediaInnovation.com) to learn more.*

*Point Park University, immersed in the heart of Downtown Pittsburgh, focuses on student success through innovative experiential learning opportunities. Point Park enrolls more than 4,000 students in over 100 undergraduate, master’s and doctoral programs offered through its Conservatory of Performing Arts, Rowland School of Business, and schools of Arts and Sciences, Communication, and Education. The University’s alumni and students represent all 50 states and 34 countries around the world. Visit [PointPark.edu](http://PointPark.edu) to learn more.*