



CENTER FOR MEDIA INNOVATION

Point Park University

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Center for Media Innovation's \$20,000 media fellowship returns during a pandemic-induced time of crisis for local media

-- Second- and third-place prize money added for current year --

PITTSBURGH, PA – Journalism outlets around the country have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Center for Media Innovation at Point Park University will be offering support with the return of the \$20,000 Doris O'Donnell Innovations in Investigative Journalism Fellowship. The fellowship, now in its second year, was designed to spotlight and take on the growing problem of underserved media markets known as news deserts.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating for local newsrooms, both here in the Pittsburgh region and around the country," said Andrew Conte, director of the Center for Media Innovation. "We want to provide substantial support to enterprising journalists who need it the most right now."

With the goal of making an even bigger impact, the fellowship this year also will award second- and third-place prizes of \$5,000 and \$2,500. The fellowship is made possible through a three-year grant from the Allegheny Foundation.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic has taken hold, many newsrooms across the country have seen mass layoffs and furloughs, and some outlets have entirely shutdown.

"For many journalism outlets, being shorthanded is nothing new, but this crisis has exacerbated the problem to extreme levels," Conte said. "We are excited to be able to add second- and third-place prize money so we can increase our support to the industry."

In early April, the Brookings Institution reported that 57 percent of the U.S. counties with reported COVID-19 cases lacked a daily newspaper and 37 percent had seen local newspapers disappear between 2004 and 2019.

"Even before COVID-19 changed our world, many local newsrooms around the country were in trouble, and local newspapers have been hit the hardest. A report from Pew shows newspapers are [half the size they were in 2008](#)," said Kristen Hare, a reporter for the Poynter Institute who covers local news



DORIS O'DONNELL
INNOVATIONS IN INVESTIGATIVE
JOURNALISM FELLOWSHIP

innovation and has been tracking pandemic-related newsroom job losses. “But we continue to see and need innovation to help local journalists uncover the stories that **have** to be told to protect healthy local democracies. We're not in a one-size-fits-all world anymore, and programs like this will help us figure out the many paths forward. “

The fellowship winner will have eight months to report 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, including an event to celebrate their work.

Last year's fellowship winner, Erica Hensley, a health/data reporter and Knight Foundation Fellow at Mississippi Today, spent the past year working on a project that examines how Mississippi handles the threat of lead poisoning. Her work compares data from state and nonprofits to examine high-risk areas, where testing, interventions and data collection are sparse and uncoordinated. The results of Hensley's investigation will be published in late June.

A panel of five distinguished judges with credentials in innovative and investigative journalism return for a second year to evaluate applicants based on value, innovation, engagement, diversity and ability. That 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 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 Bloomberg Media that explores trends shaping our country's urban future, and captures the creativity and vibrancy of our increasingly urbanized world.
- **Carl Prine**, former 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 a long time now, ever-shrinking budgets have limited the resources of local newsrooms and their ability to support investigative reporting. Everyone should be concerned with how this hastens the decline of objective, timely and impactful journalism across the country,” said Matt Groll, chairman of the Allegheny Foundation. “The Trustees of the Allegheny Foundation are greatly encouraged by the

response to this fellowship and hope it not only produces significant stories but also inspires future generations of journalists.”

Doris O’Donnell, the namesake of the award, was a pioneering journalist who began her 50-year career during World War II for the Cleveland News. She joined the Cleveland Plain Dealer in 1959, covering the Sam Sheppard murder trial that inspired “The Fugitive,” and traveling to Dallas for the aftermath of President Kennedy’s assassination and the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War. O’Donnell was hired by Richard Scaife in 1973 to write for the Greensburg Tribune-Review. She worked there for 15 years before returning to Cleveland.

“Doris was a trailblazer for the generations of women in this business who came after her,” said Sue McFarland, Greensburg editor for the Tribune-Review, who edited O’Donnell’s work. “She fought long and hard to cover some of the biggest stories of her time, and erase the notion that some assignments were off-limits to many talented journalists based purely on their gender.”

Journalists and media outlets can apply through June 30 at www.DorisODonnellFellowship.com. Finalists will be announced in August, and the ultimate winner will be announced in September.

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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 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 approximately 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 to learn more.

