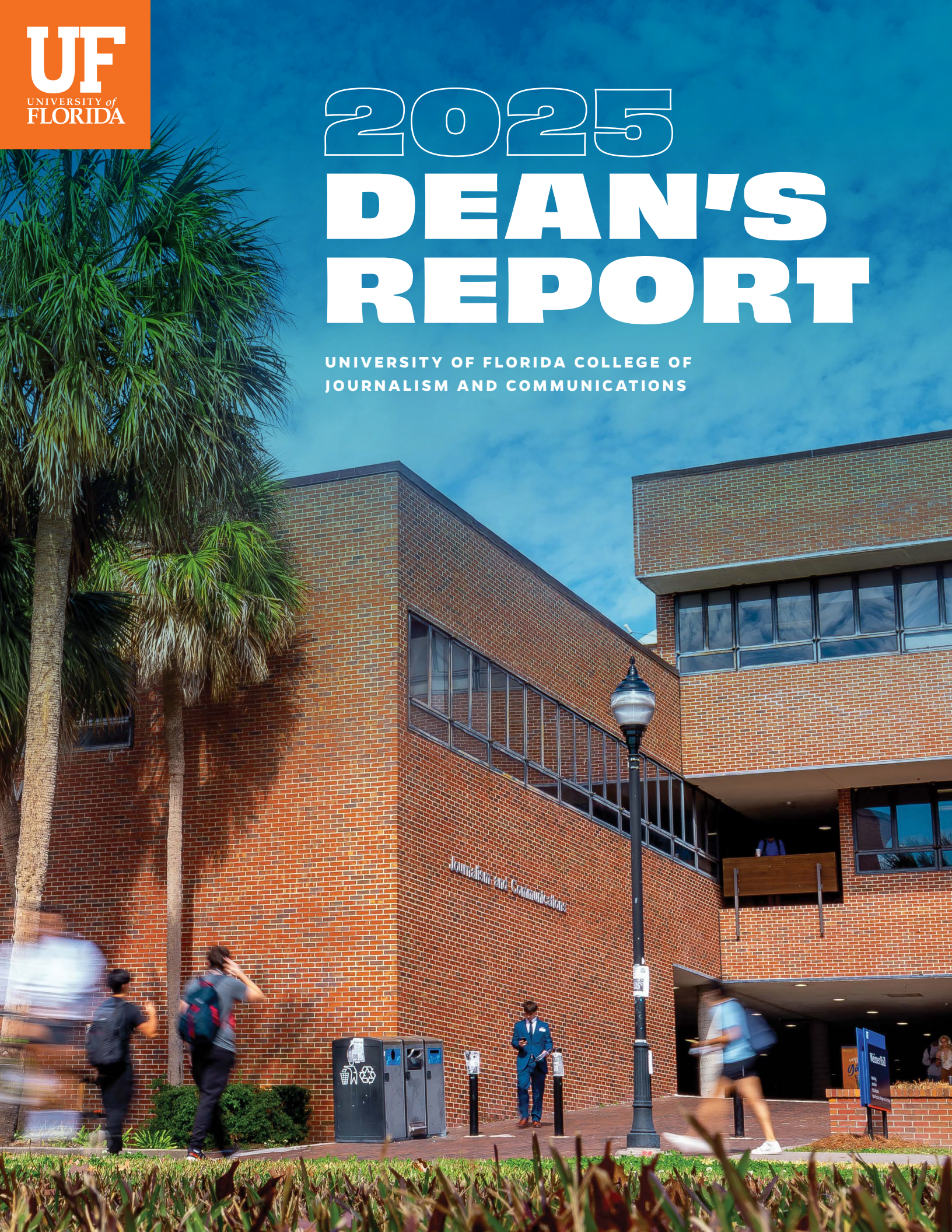


# 2025 **DEAN'S REPORT**

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA COLLEGE OF  
JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATIONS



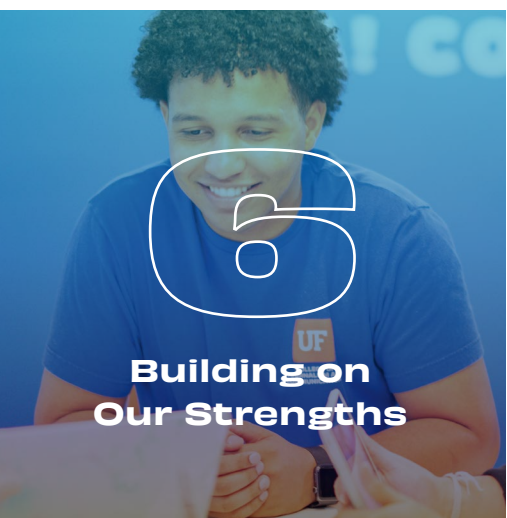




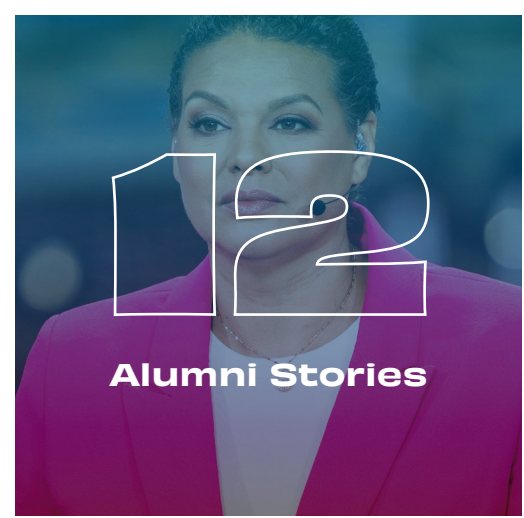
Innovation News Center News Manager Alicia Coleman, far right, instructs students in the INC news studio.



Highlights



Building on  
Our Strengths



Alumni Stories



Student Stories

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, PHOTOS,  
AND VIDEOS, VISIT [2025.JOU.UFL.EDU](https://2025.jou.ufl.edu)





# DEAN'S Message

**W**e are living in a remarkable period of transition affecting all students, faculty and alumni. Political and social norms are shifting, the media environment is adapting to new technology and public sentiment, and higher education itself is addressing new challenges, all while the University seeks a new president to lead us through uncharted waters.

For the UF College of Journalism and Communications, there is one constant: a commitment to excellence, new knowledge and unparalleled opportunities. This is evident in new curriculum and immersion experiences; award-winning work from our students, staff and faculty; peer recognition; and student placement with top employers.

By the time this is published, we will be close to completing our every-six-year reaccreditation process. After a year of data gathering and analysis and a visit in February by a team of educators and industry professionals, we await the official accreditation decision. This process afforded us the opportunity to step back and assess the strengths in our program and areas where we can improve (see pg. 6). We are extremely proud of where we are today and are dedicated to continuing our upward trajectory.

In this year's Dean's Report, we highlight some of the major accomplishments from the past year and share inspiring stories about our students, faculty, staff and alumni. Among those accomplishments are:

- Finishing **SECOND OVERALL** for the fourth year in a row in the Hearst Journalism Awards competition.
- Our Public Relations Department being named a **TOP-FIVE** PRWeek Outstanding Education Program finalist for the fifth year in a row.
- Placing **FOURTH NATIONALLY** in the third annual Broadcast Education Association school rankings.
- Our Advertising students winning **27 AWARDS** at the regional American Advertising Federation Addy competition.

As part of our efforts to provide students with skill-building opportunities outside of Gainesville, in 2025 we will expand our footprint to Washington, D.C., in a new program directed by veteran broadcast journalist and CJC alumna Jonelle Henry. Modeled after our CJCxNYC program, the D.C. experience will be focused primarily on journalism and PR majors, but open to all students.

Another hallmark of our College is the commitment to public service. Our students demonstrated exemplary professional skills as they covered three hurricanes and two national political conventions and provided extensive election-night coverage. And in late 2024, WUFT-FM was the first radio station in the country to launch BEACON, a new, AI-driven public safety service developed by our own Division of Media Properties.

Our alumni play an integral role in the College's success. Your gifts, interaction with students and career pipelines all contribute to our high national standing and are a testament to your ongoing affection for and loyalty to CJC. Each successive generation has been dedicated to making the College even stronger than the one you left.

I hope you find this year's Dean's Report informative and inspiring. And feel free to contact me at any time if you would like to learn more.

Go Gators!

**Hub Brown**  
Dean and Professor





2024 Bateman Competition team

# HIGHLIGHTS

FROM 2024

The achievements of our students, faculty and staff and continued investment in new programs propelled the College to new heights in 2024.

### Teacher of the Year

Media Production, Management, and Technology lecturer **Iman Zawahry** was selected as the 2023–2024 UF Undergraduate Teacher of the Year. Zawahry is the third CJC faculty member to receive this honor in the past five years and the seventh faculty member to be recognized since the program launched in 2000.

### \$8 Million Gift

As part of the College’s commitment to bolstering state and local journalism, CJC received an \$8 million gift from **Nathan S. Collier** to sustain the Collier Prize for State Government Accountability, create a new local journalism symposium and hire a full-time director (see below). It is the largest gift in the College’s history. Collier provided an initial gift to the College in 2019 to establish the Collier Prize, one of the largest journalism awards in the country.

### Collier Prize Director

Veteran journalist **Rick Hirsch** was named the inaugural director of the Collier Prize for State Government Accountability. Hirsch, who has more than four decades of experience, will lead efforts to expand the scope and elevate the reputation of the prize and help share excellent state and local journalism across the country.



### BEACON Emergency Alert System

WUFT-FM became the nation’s first installation of the BEACON (Broadcast Emergency Alerts and Communications Operations Network) emergency alert system. BEACON is a ground-breaking, AI-driven public safety service conceived of at CJC and developed with funding from the Florida Department of Emergency Management.

### Bateman Competition Winner

A team of public relations students received first place in the prestigious 2024 Bateman Case Study Competition. Led by Public Relations Lecturer **Christine Bucan**, this is the second year in a row that CJC placed first in the competition.

### Lifetime Research Award

Journalism Professor Emeritus **Wayne Wanta** received the 2024 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Paul J. Deutschmann Award for Excellence in Research. AEJMC’s highest research award recognizes a body of significant research over the course of an individual’s career. Wanta retired from CJC in 2023.

### New Undergraduate Dean

Journalism Department Chair **Ted Spiker** was named the new associate dean for undergraduate affairs. After 10 years in the magazine industry, Spiker joined the Journalism Department in 2001 and became interim chair in 2014 and chair in 2015.

### CNN Academy

Twelve CJC students participated in the CNN Academy, a five-day journalism training boot camp in Atlanta. CJC was one of eight colleges taking part in the first CNN Academy to be held in the U.S. Following the boot camp, 24 students from CJC, Georgia Tech and Howard University gathered in Abu Dhabi to take part in a special CNN Academy Newsroom Simulation.



Associate Dean for Undergraduate Affairs Ted Spiker

### Farewell

CJC said goodbye to a number of long-time faculty members who retired in 2024 or will retire at the end of the academic year, including: **James Babanikos, John Freeman, Michael Leslie, Norm Lewis, Mindy McAdams, Ken Pemberton, Churchill Roberts, Steve Russell** and **Mike Weigold**. We are very grateful for their immense contributions to the College.



UF Teacher of the Year Iman Zawahry



FOR MORE INFORMATION, PHOTOS, AND VIDEOS, VISIT [2025.JOU.UFL.EDU](https://2025.JOU.UFL.EDU)

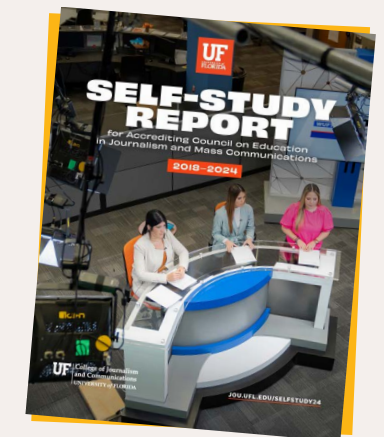


# BUILDING ON OUR *STRENGTHS*



In 2024, the College began preparing an extensive accreditation self-study, resulting in a 300-page report and culminating with a site visit in February from a team of academics and industry professionals. The College's reaccreditation will be announced this spring.

Accreditation by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) is a mark of quality for journalism and mass communications programs and assures students and their parents that they are receiving the highest-quality education that prepares them for their careers.



As part of this process, which occurs every six years, CJC identified its key strengths, including:

## Quality of students

Student talent was evident, in part, in the number of student awards received in the past several years.

## Quality of instruction

The College offers more than 50 skills courses and all departments offer students multiple specialization tracks that allow them to hone their skills in areas they are most passionate about. In addition, three CJC faculty members have been named UF Teacher of the Year in the past five years.

## Immersion opportunities

CJC provides students with state-of-the-art venues and guidance from seasoned professionals to hone their career skills. Students also gain experience in student-organization-based opportunities, including the Elevate advertising agency, Alpha public relations agency, Atrium magazine and Chompics film production.

## Research productivity

CJC scholars have demonstrated a consistent increase in productivity. For example, in 2023, faculty peer-reviewed articles appeared in 111 journals, compared to 68 in 2017. During the review period, faculty were published in 224 journals and presented more than 700 research papers across major academic conferences, with 94 top-paper awards.

## State support

The College has directly benefited from the Florida Legislature's strong financial support of the University over the past several years. In 2023–2024 alone, CJC received one-time funds from the President's Office, recurring funds for discretionary spending and CJC received funds to support its own strategic initiatives.

## Career preparation and placement

The launching of the College's Office of Careers and Corporate Partnerships in 2020, funded in part by a generous alumni donation, has allowed CJC to provide enhanced career preparation and placement opportunities. In 2023–2024, 49% of students were offered employment at the time of graduation vs. 38% in 2019–2020.

## Commitment to community

To recruit students from different backgrounds and experiences, the College developed a program targeting community colleges in underserved communities. CJC revamped its faculty and staff recruitment process to ensure a balanced pool of candidates and an equitable evaluation process. It also developed a variety of new professional development and leadership programs.



# STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Thanks to new strategic funding from the Florida Legislature and the UF President’s Office, the College was able to launch a range of new initiatives that will benefit students, faculty and staff in the near term.

## CJCxDC

As part of CJC’s strategy to provide immersion opportunities outside of Gainesville, the College is establishing an educational and professional presence in Washington, D.C., with an initiative modeled after our CJCxNYC program. The program is open to all students but focused on immersion experiences for journalism and public relations majors.

## RESEARCH ADVANCEMENTS

To enhance existing labs to better support faculty and student research, funds were used to purchase new desktop computers, iPads and laptops; add new desks, tables and chairs; and remove old technology. To better manage and elevate research initiatives and expand international outreach, CJC hired **Cloe Zeidan** as a full-time research project manager.

## AUTHENTICALLY

Authentically, developed by the **Consortium on Trust in Media and Technology**, is an AI-driven tool to help equip journalists and other communicators with the insights they need to make informed decisions in their writing. Strategic funding helped in the development of the tool, which is intended to identify potential bias in writing in real-time and suggest alternative language.

## NEWS DESKS

Funds were used to support new immersion opportunities in the Innovation News Center (INC), including:

- **DISASTER DESK:** The INC is building an ad hoc team of reporters and visual journalists to cover major weather events and other emergencies. The desk will focus on public service reporting about communities who may live in less-durable housing, may have language barriers or may not be able to afford to evacuate or go to area or regional shelters.
- **ENVIRONMENT & AG DESK:** This news desk provides environment, climate and agricultural news focusing on Florida’s rural news deserts and statewide accountability reporting. Journalist **Rose Schnabel** joined CJC as a Report for America corps member focusing on coverage and connections in rural areas.
- **POLITICAL REPORTING:** This program provides students with more experience in political journalism. Four students traveled to the Republican National Convention and four to the Democratic National Convention. Six students attended the presidential inauguration from Jan. 18–21 to provide coverage for the North Central Florida community.



## GATOR GAMEDAY

Funding was also used to create a Gator football pre-game show modeled after ESPN’s GameDay program. CJC alumnus **Kat Orr** was hired to oversee production of seven home-game broadcasts with both live and pre-recorded content, including a game preview, insightful breakdowns and analytics and profiles of UF athletes and coaches.



## ORANGE & BLUE FILM FESTIVAL

Funds were used to create the Orange & Blue Film Festival, the only state-wide collegiate/high school film festival hosted by a Florida public university. The two-day event, held in April 2024, included film screenings, workshops, industry panels and awards. Twenty-two films from 61 submitted were screened for a sold-out attendance. An immersion course was created for the festival in Fall 2024, enrolling 37 students to help manage the 2025 event.

## ATLAS LAB

Strategic funding helped the College’s digital media analysis lab launch two new social media listening platforms — Talkwalker and Brandwatch. Access to these new platforms will help students gain skills with tools that are in wide use in the communication industry.

## SUMMER MEDIA INSTITUTE

Funding was provided to CJC’s summer program for high school students to provide “Out of Stater Gator” scholarships to out-of-state students and help position the program as one of the nation’s best. Funds helped 14 out-of-state students afford the week-long program, including support for travel costs.



# COMBATING DECLINING TRUST

As trust in media and technology continued to wane, CJC scholars wanted to better understand the reasons for declining trust and ways to address them, from using artificial intelligence to write stories to using virtual humans to combat climate-change misinformation. Here are a few of the studies published in 2024.

## Can AI-Generated News Help Reverse the Declining Level of Trust in News?

Researchers pondered whether credibility and trust in news are sacrificed when articles are AI-generated and if perception of public nonprofits could benefit from exposure to that content. Their conclusions: the higher the exposure and use of AI-generated news, the higher the credibility.

## Untrustworthy Hyperlinks on News Sites are Adding to the Misinformation Crisis

Misinformation is spreading rapidly in the digital universe, especially during election season, and the hyperlinks found on untrustworthy news sites may be partly to blame, according to an interdisciplinary team of researchers.



## Can Virtual Humans Combat Climate Change Misinformation?

Virtual (or artificial) humans, such as virtual human influencers, have become increasingly valuable to brands and marketers worldwide. But what about their effectiveness in tackling big societal issues? Could computer-generated characters effectively influence human behavior for the greater good?



## Pixels vs. People: The Battle for Consumer Trust in Influencer Marketing

Researchers examined the effectiveness of virtual influencers compared to humans in affecting brand attitudes and purchase intentions and found that, while virtual influencers are not yet ready to replace human influencers, they are carving out their own niche.

## "Don't Believe Everything You Read Online": How AI Fact-Checking Could Challenge Political Bias in Science Information Processing

As social media has grown into many people's primary news source, so has its potential for misinformation. Some have called for increased fact-checking, yet many users dismiss the fact-check itself as false, especially when it challenges their preexisting views. Could an AI fact-checker seem more objective and help change minds?

## How Partisanship and Political Fandom Affect the Spread of Misinformation

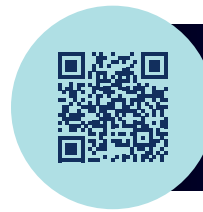
As the nation faced another contentious election cycle, the spread of misinformation continued to be rampant. Scholars explored the predictability of whether or not people would seek and share misinformation without first fact-checking it.



TO READ THESE AND OTHER  
RESEARCH SUMMARIES, VISIT  
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# Alumni



TO READ MORE ABOUT OUR ALUMNI,  
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## Tyler Rutstein // B.S. Journalism 2011

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, GLOBAL BRANDS AND MARKETING, UNDER ARMOUR

In his freshman year, **Tyler Rutstein** was undecided about a major until he met Journalism Professor **Ted Spiker**, who suggested he major in journalism because he could write about whatever he was passionate about. That led him to the world of sports media and marketing.

Now SVP, Global Brands and Marketing at Under Armour, he spent most of the past five years helping to grow Overtime, which creates content, leagues and merchandise for sports enthusiasts

and now has more than 100 million followers across seven platforms.

Rutstein, who is a UF 2025 40 Under 40 honoree, prides himself on hiring the right people. "I would hire someone based off of them submitting a one-minute TikTok video that has a rich story or a story about themselves," he said. In this changing media environment, he encourages students to understand how to brand themselves and to "challenge a lot of conventions."



## Rob Stecklow // B.S. Journalism 1995

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT MARKETING, CBS "STREAMING FIRST" SPORTS, NEWS, PRIMETIME AND ORIGINAL PROGRAMS, PARAMOUNT+

**Rob Stecklow** visited UF for the first time during Gator Growl. It made an impression.

"When I got back home, I told my dad, 'I'll die if I don't go there,'" Stecklow said. "I was blown away by the campus, the atmosphere, the stadium, the Growl, everything UF had to offer. I had never seen anything like it."

Since his days as a UF journalism student working at the campus TV station, Stecklow has scaled the ranks in sports, media and entertainment marketing.

In his role at Paramount+, Stecklow is focused on marketing CBS content on the streaming service. Along the way, he's held more than a dozen positions at top-tier organizations, including ABC Sports, the NFL, DIRECTV, Verizon and DAZN.

"I've always looked for opportunities to grow and learn," Stecklow said of his multifaceted career. "Whether it was starting out in production or transitioning into marketing, I've been lucky to work with great people and brands."

"I was blown away by the campus, the atmosphere, the stadium, the Growl, everything UF had to offer. I had never seen anything like it."

## Amy Araya // B.S. Public Relations 2008

ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL COUNSEL, DISNEY/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

**Amy Araya** uses the writing and fact-finding skills she learned from CJC Journalism Professor **Mike Foley** every day at the Walt Disney Company's National Geographic.

"He sparked the curiosity in me on how I viewed story-telling and proper fact-checking," she said. "It is incredibly relevant in my work in television law. I poignantly remember sitting in Foley's

class and he was really questioning the source — primary and secondary. He would dock us heavily if we made a mistake in our submitted assignments, but he also treated reporting as recognition of humanity, the human side of things."

Now living in Washington, D.C., she's reconnecting with CJC to share her experiences, mentor students and encourage others to follow their dreams.



## Ryan Schinman // B.S. Telecommunication 1993

CO-FOUNDER, MAYFLOWER ENTERTAINMENT

**Ryan Schinman** entered CJC not knowing what he wanted to do, but he found a caring staff, friends and a love for marketing and advertising — all of which led to his involvement in starting, co-founding or being a partner in 10 companies.

After graduation, he was ready to work at a radio station. "I thrived at CJC — I enjoyed the classes, the advertising and writing." But he didn't want to work in a small market making \$28,000 so he

accepted a job as an agent at Athletes & Artists, a sports marketing firm. He represented three UF football players in negotiations with the NFL.

Now he spends his days connecting some of the world's most recognized brands with music and talent, increasing the impact of marketing through his company Mayflower Entertainment, and, having recently moved to Miami, reconnecting with CJC to help in any way possible.



## Sara Sidner // B.S. Telecommunication 1995, Hall of Fame 2011

ANCHOR AND SENIOR NATIONAL REPORTER, CNN

**Sara Sidner** has spent nearly two decades tackling some of the most difficult stories of our time.

Her path to journalism was shaped at CJC, where she gained hands-on experience at WUFT, the local NPR and PBS affiliate. Sidner credits CJC's Journalism program for giving her both the theoretical knowledge and real-world experience necessary to succeed in the field.

Among the major stories Sidner has covered are the George Floyd protests, the COVID-19 pandemic, and conflicts in Afghanistan, Libya and India. But her most personal story came in 2023 when she was diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer. Choosing to share her battle publicly, she used her platform to raise awareness, particularly about the health disparities that lead to higher mortality rates for Black women.



# Students

## MAKING

## A DIFFERENCE



### Ethan Eibe // Journalism Senior

The moment **Ethan Eibe** enters any sporting arena, it becomes his playground. But instead of sporting a helmet, he puts on his black headset and looks out from the press box, ready to tell a captivating story in real time.

But during his time at CJC as a sports broadcaster, he was disappointed that the student sports broadcasts were not publicized. So, he set out to create the Orange and Blue Sports Network to feature student content. The site

includes live streams, play-by-play archives and podcasts.

If pioneering an entire sports network wasn't enough, Eibe took his skills overseas as an intern for Maccabi Media where he and nine other students covered the 2023 Pan American Maccabi Games, an event for Jewish athletes.



### Sofia Abolfathi // MPMT Senior

Few undergraduate filmmakers can boast their own IMDb page, but for Media Production, Management, and Technology senior **Sophia Abolfathi**, it's just another milestone in an already remarkable career. The award-winning documentary filmmaker has spent her time at UF developing a distinct storytelling voice—one deeply rooted in themes of community, justice and activism.

Her latest film, *The Sunflower*, chronicles the powerful bond between the UF women's softball team and a young

cancer patient. It follows the success of *March of the Mangroves*, her environmental documentary that won a 2024 Suncoast Regional Emmy and was named Best Student Film at the Better Cities Film Festival. Her earlier film, *A Seat at the Table*, which explored food justice in Gainesville, won the Grand Jury Award for Student Film at the Awareness Film Festival in Los Angeles.

With a firm commitment to storytelling that uplifts communities and sparks dialogue, she is poised to make a lasting impact in documentary filmmaking.



### Samuel Arowosafe // Master of Arts in Mass Communication

Nigerian native **Samuel Arowosafe** arrived at CJC ready to add to his journalism and marketing skills by pursuing a Research and Theory master's, which allows for customizing curriculum and delving into areas like artificial intelligence.

"One thing I'm excited about is UF moving in the direction of being globally competitive in terms of artificial intelligence and the faculty in CJC who have specialization in AI."

Arowosafe is working in the Infrastructure for Communities, Ecology for Data (ICED) Hub, where he assists in research on things like how people in rural areas use AI for the betterment of their lives. That work, along with an internship at UNICEF and good grades, led to Arowosafe receiving a 2024 UF International Center Certificate of Outstanding Merit.



### Carolina Gutiérrez // Advertising Senior

Advertising senior **Carolina Gutiérrez** left her home country of Bolivia to pursue her dream of a career in advertising. But as an international student, her path wasn't without challenges.

"Being away from family, friends and my home was hard," Gutiérrez said. "I had to push myself to build connections and find strength in my solitude." Those challenges set the foundation for her personal growth. She built a community for other fellow international students,

organizing shared meals and fostering new friendships, which gave her a sense of purpose and belonging.

Her efforts earned her a UF International Student Achievement Award, which recognizes outstanding contributions from the international student community and celebrates international students' commitment to leadership, academic excellence and campus involvement.



### Vailma Roca Fernandez // Digital Journalism and Multimedia Storytelling Online Master's

**Vailma Roca Fernandez's** path to earning her master's degree online at CJC speaks to perseverance and lifelong learning. With a background in law and international business, she transitioned into journalism, driven by a deep-rooted passion passed down through her family.

Originally from the Dominican Republic, she practiced international law in Miami before moving to Gainesville. Now, she serves in Alachua County Public

Schools Public Information Office as Interpreter-Specialist/Public Information for LEP (limited English proficiency) Communities while pursuing her online master's in digital journalism and multimedia storytelling at UF.

Roca Fernandez says she values the structure of online learning, which allows her to focus deeply on investigative journalism, a field she hopes to enter full-time.



# Faculty AND Staff

## BLAZING TRAILS



**Chanelle Cox**  
ONLINE ACADEMIC ADVISER

### Using Empathy and Information to Help Guide Online Students

**Chanelle Cox** learned at an early age that hard work gets noticed, and she thinks putting that into practice guiding students and updating programs led to her being named CJC's Professional Adviser of the Year in 2024.

Cox, who advises online Advertising students, approaches students with empathy to meet them where they are, teaching them about their academic programs so they understand not only which courses are needed for their degrees but why they are taking them.

"All advisers have different advising philosophies. My philosophy is to try to give students as much information as I can about their programs so they are confident as to what they need to take and how those courses fit into the context of their degrees, and also to help them connect to resources to overcome any barriers they may be experiencing along the way."



**Yu-Hao Lee**  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, MEDIA PRODUCTION, MANAGEMENT, AND TECHNOLOGY/DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH FOR THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEREST COMMUNICATIONS

### Using Technology to Tell Complex Stories

**Yu-Hao Lee** left an award-winning career in journalism to pursue research that would explore innovative ways of telling complex stories. His interests gravitated to how emerging technologies could be used for more effective storytelling.

Unlike many technology scholars, he's not interested so much in the technology itself but more about how humans react to changes in technology, particularly related to social change. In one recent collaboration with a professor in Taiwan, he studied cross-cultural communication in the metaverse for Meta. For the Center for Public Interest Communications, Lee explores issues like affordable housing, basic income policies and communicating health information to rural communities.

"I think CJC is the perfect place to experiment with these ideas," said Lee, the College's Outstanding Doctoral Mentor in 2024. "I want to do solid, rigorous research but also see how they play out in practice. That balance between theory, research and practice and professional training here allows me to work with people who have different expertise and also test a lot of these ideas."



**Juliana Fernandes**  
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, ADVERTISING

### Pursuing Interdisciplinary Research to Gain New Perspectives

**Juliana Fernandes** has a vast amount of knowledge on how disinformation spreads quickly through social media like Facebook, something she shares when conducting interdisciplinary research that one day could slow that phenomenon.

But to add an expanded perspective on her research, Fernandes has worked with colleagues in the UF Wertheim College of Engineering's Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering to study why social media users find disinformation ads so engaging and to develop a framework to investigate influence cues in online texts to detect deception.

She's shared her expertise and learned in the process. "They have so much knowledge on how to extract meaningful information from all sorts of content and doing that in an automated fashion," Fernandes said. "It's interesting to see other perspectives and how they think about the same problems and questions that we have, but in a very different, applied way."

She also works with Promise Scholars, first-generation students and those from underrepresented populations. These students "may not have a parent or sibling who can tell them: Don't take all these crazy classes at once. I make sure they understand that everyone at the university is an ally," she said.



**Houston Wells**  
SENIOR LECTURER, MEDIA PRODUCTION, MANAGEMENT, AND TECHNOLOGY

### Helping Students Stay Engaged and Move Forward

Working with students from their introductory classes to their senior documentary-making course, **Houston Wells** ensures all students are engaged and participating—whether they want the attention or not.

It's just one reason Wells was named Faculty Mentor of the Year in 2024. "As an instructor and faculty member, I sometimes reflect on my own experiences and how easy it was to feel anonymous," said Wells, who earned his bachelor's and two master's from UF. "You're one of dozens of students in a class, so it's very easy to sort of feel like you are slipping under the radar a bit. I try not to let any of my students feel that way."

He not only helps them with their coursework—he also provides them with career guidance. "It's a big scary world out there when you're getting ready to graduate and it's nice to have somebody to bounce ideas off of, who's in your corner and has confidence in your abilities."



**Heidi Kirby**  
ADJUNCT LECTURER, ONLINE MASTER'S PROGRAM

### Teaching The Fine Art of Podcasting

As instructional designer and lecturer for "The Art of Podcasting" online master's course, **Heidi Kirby** brings a special passion for storytelling in the digital age. She encourages her students to explore the ever-evolving world of podcasting to prepare them far beyond a classroom setting.

She started her own podcast, "BLOC (Building Learning and Organizational Culture)" as a marketing effort for a small startup, but it quickly evolved into a much larger platform. With over 30,000 downloads across 100 countries, Kirby uses her platform to share meaningful conversations within the learning and development industry.

"The Art of Podcasting" teaches students how to develop their target audience persona, plan episodes, design logos, record interviews and everything in between. Students gain an overall understanding of what goes on behind the podcasting scenes. At the end of the semester, students have a fully developed podcast trailer, which has been proven to be helpful in securing them post-graduate opportunities.



TO READ MORE ABOUT OUR FACULTY AND STAFF, SCAN THE QR CODE OR GO TO [2025.JOU.UFL.EDU/PAGE/FACULTY-STAFF](https://2025.jou.ufl.edu/page/faculty-staff)





# DEPARTMENT AND IMMERSION UPDATES

Advertising Instructional Professor Lissy Calienes

## Media Production, Management, and Technology

- Developed a new course in collaboration with The Agency that will be used to start a production-focused immersion experience in 2025.
- Added five additional special-topics electives: Managing Entertainment TV & Film, Sports Media Entrepreneurship, SEC Film Festival, Social Media Content Creation, and Strategies in Digital Engagement.
- Updating all course descriptions and titles.

## Public Relations

- Student team won the Bateman competition for the second year in a row.
- Student team won the Grand Prize for the Page Case Study Competition.
- Public Relations Lecturer **Rob Judin** started PRISM, a student organization focused on PR in Sports Management.

## Division of Media Properties

- WUFT-TV/FM and FPEN secured their highest levels of state funding in their history.
- FPEN served all public TV and radio stations in Florida and South Carolina during a destructive hurricane season.
- WUFT-TV and WRUF-TV moved to a new, consolidated TV master control room on the second floor.

## DEPARTMENTS

### Advertising

- Introduced three new courses: Creative Portfolio 3, The Craft of Visual Communication, and Collaboration with AI for Solving Social Problems.
- Added five new permanent courses: Artificial Intelligence and Advertising, Game-Changing Advertising Ideas, AI-Driven Social Media Insights, Advertising Portfolio 2, and Advertising Portfolio 3.
- Certified two courses for the UF AI Certificate course list.

### Journalism

- Introduced two new courses: Principles of Journalism and Editing & Coaching.
- Added four experimental special-topics courses: Music Journalism, TV Sports Reporting, Podcasting and Scholarship in Journalism.
- In Fall 2024, offered a record number of News Center Practicum immersion sections (25) in various forms of news, photo, sports, meteorology, and more.

## IMMERSION

### Atlas Lab

- Successfully introduced two new social media listening platforms.
- Supported class visits and guided class projects.
- Provided research support for seven graduate students.
- Hosted workshops and watch parties focusing on real-time analytics.

Atlas Lab Director Nathan Carpenter



### Innovation News Center

- Launched WUFT Midday, a second, live daily newscast that airs on WRUF-TV.
- Provided extended breaking news coverage for hurricanes Helene and Milton, including 12–16 hours of special newscasts on TV and continuous coverage on radio and digital.
- More than 90 students participated in Election Night coverage, including three continuous hours on TV with seven live-shot crews.

Students working in The Agency



- Launched Sports Lab, a two-hour sports talk radio show on ESPN Gainesville. Students produce and anchor the radio show.
- Student journalism published on INC platforms earned more than 100 state, regional and national awards in 2024.

### The Agency

- The Agency saw record interest from students, with 476 applicants in Fall 2024 and 155 students participating in the program, a 16% increase year-over-year.
- Two new faculty members joined The Agency, allowing us to engage 50 more students per semester.
- Disney expanded its yearly retainer by 284%, driven by renewed contracts with Disney Advertising and new contracts with Walt Disney's HR team.
- Hulu launched The Agency's B2B campaign, crafted in collaboration with their internal agency, across the U.S. and Canada.

### Graduate Division

- In 2024, we celebrated the graduation of 13 doctoral students, with at least eight of these graduates securing tenure-track positions at various academic institutions. We also received 97 completed applications for the 2025 cohort—a 194% increase compared to last year.
- Additionally, 31 on-campus and 243 online master's students completed their degrees.
- Launched a new online master's concentration in Digital Journalism and Multimedia Storytelling.
- Of all online master's students graduating in 2024, 98% said they would recommend the program to their colleagues.



# NEW FACULTY & STAFF

In 2024 and early 2025, CJC was proud to welcome distinguished faculty and staff to the College as part of our continued efforts to provide students with new educational and skills development opportunities, and academia and industry with new insights.

## FACULTY

<b>Olivia Bullock</b> <i>Assistant Professor, Advertising</i>	<b>Antoine Haywood</b> <i>Assistant Professor, Journalism</i>	<b>Kat Orr</b> <i>Hearst Visiting Professor, Innovation News Center</i>
<b>Lindita Camaj</b> <i>Associate Professor, Journalism</i>	<b>Austin Hubner</b> <i>Assistant Professor, Public Relations/STEM Translational Communication Center</i>	<b>Andre Sanders</b> <i>Assistant In, Innovation News Center</i>
<b>Francis Dalisay</b> <i>Associate Professor, Journalism</i>	<b>Jiawei Liu</b> <i>Assistant Professor, Advertising/STEM Translational Communication Center</i>	<b>Jeremy St. Louis</b> <i>Associate In and Sports Director, Innovation News Center</i>
<b>Daron Dean</b> <i>Visiting Lecturer, Journalism</i>	<b>Kim Fowler</b> <i>Visiting Lecturer, MPMT</i>	<b>Carlina Williams</b> <i>Visiting Professor, MPMT</i>
<b>Jeongmin Ham</b> <i>Assistant Professor, Advertising</i>	<b>Wenlin Liu</b> <i>Associate Professor, Public Relations</i>	

## STAFF

<b>Jenna Ayoub</b> <i>Visual Coordinator, Communication</i>	<b>Jonelle Henry</b> <i>Director, CJCxDC</i>	<b>Rose Schnabel</b> <i>Report for America Corps Member, Innovation News Center</i>
<b>David Barasoain</b> <i>Associate In, Innovation News Center</i>	<b>Rick Hirsch</b> <i>Director, Collier Prize</i>	<b>Sydney Sims</b> <i>Outreach Coordinator, Brechner Freedom of Information Project</i>
<b>Jack Barry</b> <i>Senior Researcher, Center for Public Interest Communications</i>	<b>Bailey Hudson</b> <i>CJC Online Instructional Designer</i>	<b>Austin Soto</b> <i>Academic Adviser, Graduate Division</i>
<b>Derek Beaudoin</b> <i>CJC Online Multimedia Project Manager</i>	<b>Terrell Jenkins</b> <i>Outreach Coordinator, PATH</i>	<b>Jennifer Tucker</b> <i>Administrative Specialist, STEM Translational Communication Center</i>
<b>Larry Bornacelli</b> <i>Senior Broadcast Engineer, DMP</i>	<b>Rebecca Larson</b> <i>Admissions Officer, Graduate Division</i>	<b>April Welcome</b> <i>Human Resource Generalist</i>
<b>Rachel Coffey</b> <i>Multimedia Specialist, Media Services</i>	<b>William Maxham</b> <i>Meteorologist</i>	<b>Sabrina Yeahia</b> <i>Administrative Assistant, Graduate Division</i>
<b>Rob Harder</b> <i>Director of Broadcast Operations, DMP</i>	<b>Tim Miller</b> <i>Chief Meteorologist/Director FPREN</i>	<b>Cloe Zeidan</b> <i>Research Coordinator, Research Division</i>
	<b>Áine Pennello</b> <i>Multimedia Reporter and Producer, Innovation News Center</i>	

# MAJOR Awards in 2024

Following are some of the numerous awards CJC received in 2024 for student, professional and academic work.

## Undergraduate Students

(First number represents total awards, second number represents first place or winner awards)

### ADVERTISING

- American Advertising Federation (AAF) North Central Florida Student Awards: 24, 12 (first place and gold)
- One Club Miami Student Competition: 2

### JOURNALISM AND MEDIA PRODUCTION, MANAGEMENT, AND TECHNOLOGY AWARDS

- Hearst Journalism Awards (College): 2nd Overall, 2nd in Writing, 4th in Audio and TV, 4th in Multimedia
- Hearst Journalism Awards (Students): Intercollegiate: 10, 2; National: 1
- Broadcast Education Association (BEA) National Rankings: 4th Overall, 3rd in News, 4th in Documentary, 6th in Film & Video, 9th in Sports
- Florida Society of News Editors: 11, 6
- Edward R. Murrow Awards: National: 2, 2; Regional: 3, 3

### PUBLIC RELATIONS

- PR Week Outstanding Education Program: Top 5
- PR Week Outstanding Student: Honorable Mention
- PRSSA Bateman Case Study Competition: 1st
- Page Student Case Study Competition: 1st
- PRNEWS Education A-List



FOR A COMPLETE LIST AWARDS, VISIT  
[JOU.UFL.EDU/ABOUT-THE-COLLEGE/AWARDS](https://jcu.ufl.edu/about-the-college/awards)

## Graduate Students

- BEA Top Paper Award: Eve Heffron and Jessica Parks
- Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
  - Advertising Division, First Place Graduate and Undergraduate Student Paper Award: Chris DeFelice
  - Communication Technology Division, Top Paper: Eliana DuBosar, Brittany Shaugnessy
- American Academy of Advertising Doctoral Dissertation Award: Fanjue Liu
- UF Superior Accomplishment Award: Nikki Lyons

## Faculty and Staff Awards

- AAF North Central Florida Professional Awards: 2 gold
- American Academy of Advertising Research Fellowships: Yang Feng, Hyehyun Julia Kim
- Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
  - Paul J. Deutschmann Award for Excellence in Research: Wayne Wanta
  - Advertising Division 2024 Distinguished Teaching Award: Yang Feng
  - Advertising Division Top Special-Topic Paper Award: Jeongmin Ham
  - International Communication Division's Teaching Contest Winner and the Top Method Paper Award: Rebecca Frazer
- AVA Digital Awards: 2 platinum
- BEA Awards Best Textbook: Amy Jo Coffey
- BEA Awards Top Papers: Seungahn Nah
- PRNEWS Impact Communications Awards Mentor of the Year: Angela Bradbery
- Quality Matters Outstanding Impact by an Individual in Higher Education Award: Cheryl Oberlin





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