Collaborative reporting project wins first place for Gaylord College, Oklahoma Watch

Tulsa, Okla.- Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication and Oklahoma Watch at the University of Oklahoma won first place at the Great Plains Journalism Awards on April 18 for “Talk with Us,” a mobile video reporting project on the effects of poverty on local communities by a team of journalists, scholars, and students.

One of 12 projects funded by competitive grants in 2014-2015 from the Online News Association Challenge Fund for Innovation in Journalism Education, “Talk with Us” used mobile video reporting to place residents of impoverished neighborhoods in conversation with policy makers and elected officials.

High school and college students completed the reporting with investigative journalists at Oklahoma Watch. Scholars from across the campus at OU also contributed research and data to the project.

“The award in the Great Plains competition is great recognition for our program and our partnership with Oklahoma Watch,” said Ed Kelley, dean of Gaylord College. “As one of the first recipients of the Challenge Fund initiative, we wanted to help create a meaningful project- in this case, in-depth interviews on issues affecting inner city Oklahoma City. We’re glad the Great Plains judges saw the value of what Gaylord College, Oklahoma Watch and our high school partners produced.”
The Tulsa Press Club and Benevolent Association presents the Great Plains Journalism Awards to magazines and newspapers in eight states: Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Key to the project was the collaboration between academics, professional journalists and student journalists.

“Part of our mission at Oklahoma Watch is to develop the journalists and journalism of the future,” said David Fritze, executive editor of Oklahoma Watch. “That’s why we work closely with Gaylord College and other OU students and faculty. It was an adventurous public-service project and a learning experience for professionals and students alike. As professionals, we learned that given the opportunity, and given the chance to exercise a new craft on a repeated, guided basis, students will make tremendous strides in a short amount of time, becoming partners as much as apprentices.”

Newsgathering and reporting regularly involves contact with unknown communities and issues that are new to a journalist. As Associate Dean David Craig of Gaylord College pointed out, this project exposed students to issues that don’t receive much news coverage, yet impact inner city and impoverished communities all the same.

“This project was high-quality journalism that highlighted some important community problems and pushed the students to grow professionally and personally,” said Craig. “We are proud of what this project means for journalism education, as well as the partnership that developed between a professional news organization and students of different ages. The experience broadened the perspectives of the students and gave them important real-world experience beyond campus events. We hope this will be a model for future projects on important community issues.”

Students from Santa Fe South High School and Harding Charter Preparatory High School in Oklahoma City joined with Gaylord College students and faculty, Oklahoma Watch reporters, and scholars in the university library, geographic information science, and social work.

Project members interviewed community residents in three Oklahoma City neighborhoods using mobile equipment to gather their concerns. These interviews were then paired with interviews with area leaders.
Information for the project was gathered during the summer months of 2014 through spring 2015.

The website for “Talk with Us” can be found here.

More information on the project’s implications for journalism education can be found here.

About Gaylord College

 Ranked in the top ten of all journalism programs and top seven advertising programs in the nation, Gaylord College offers undergraduate majors in journalism, creative media production, public relations, advertising, and one of the oldest professional writing programs nationally. The College takes pride in providing its 1,000 students and graduate students with cutting-edge learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom.

About Oklahoma Watch

 Oklahoma Watch is a nonprofit, nonpartisan media organization that produces in-depth and investigative content on a range of public-policy issues facing the state. Its mission is to dig beneath the surface of issues of public importance, provide insightful analysis and reveal meaningful trends, facts, issues, underlying causes and possible solutions. Oklahoma Watch also holds public forums in an effort to promote civil discourse on critical issues. Oklahoma Watch content can be found at oklahomawatch.org.

About the University of Oklahoma

The University of Oklahoma (OU) is a public research university located in Norman, Oklahoma, USA. Founded in 1890, today the university has over 30,000 students and offers baccalaureate, master’s, doctorate and professional programs. David Lyle Boren, a former U.S. Senator and Oklahoma governor, has served as president of the University of Oklahoma since 1994.