

HOW TO GET INVOLVED WITH THE WISCONSIN CENTER FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism has become an important training ground for current and future generations of investigative journalists. More than two dozen students have served internships or done full-time freelance work with the Center, learning valuable skills that they have used to secure work in journalism and related fields in Haiti, Kenya, Russia and across the United States.

INTERNSHIPS

The Center hires paid interns in investigative reporting, and public engagement and marketing full-time in the summer and part-time during the school year. Pay is \$11 an hour. To be eligible for internships, applicants must be enrolled at the time of application as UW-Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication undergraduate or graduate students.

The application period for our 2017 summer internships has expired, but watch for news of future internship openings. Announcements about internships are posted on our website and Facebook and Twitter accounts, and on the journalism school's listservs and social media accounts.

FREELANCE OPPORTUNITIES

The Center welcomes freelance pitches. We are looking for stories about government integrity and quality of life in Wisconsin, written for a statewide audience. Broad topics include the economy, education, environment, justice system and health. We report on systems that are not working, and on potential solutions.

We accept pitches from students as well as seasoned journalists. Our freelance budget in 2017 is small — about \$7,000 — and we have limited staff time for editing, so we are highly selective. Rates are by negotiation and depend on the story's complexity and the reporter's experience.

Send pitches to pitch@wisconsinwatch.org. See back page for our guide to freelance pitching.

CLASSROOM COLLABORATIONS

The Center works with classes in the UW-Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication to produce publishable projects for a statewide audience. In spring 2015, students in professor Deborah Blum's investigative reporting class co-produced one of the Center's most significant series to date, *Failure at the Faucet*, which continues to look at problems with Wisconsin's drinking water. The series has received considerable state and national attention.

In collaboration with SJMC, the Center launched Journalism 420 in spring 2017, an investigative reporting course taught by managing editor and veteran reporter Dee J. Hall. Students have the opportunity to produce investigations with the goal of publication by WCIJ and distribution across Wisconsin. Keep an eye out for future course listings and feel free to email Dee Hall at dhall@wisconsinwatch.org for questions or to express interest in the course.



PITCH GUIDELINES FOR FREELANCE WRITERS

WHAT'S THE STORY?

A story is not a topic, like “the toxicity of fire retardants.” A story can be expressed as a declarative sentence: “Wisconsin furniture manufacturers are soaking couches in toxic chemicals without telling people.” A topic requires inspiration; a pitch requires reporting. This is the top mistake we see with pitches. We hope these guidelines clarify what we need. The trouble with investigative work, of course, is that you don’t know what you’re going to find until you do the work, and you don’t get paid for anything until somebody approves the story. But you still have to do enough reporting beforehand to be able to say what you think the lead is or might be. That reporting usually can’t be done entirely on the Internet.

WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

Use all the same tools you’d use in a story — stats, quotes, vivid descriptions. Who is affected? Our guiding values are: “Protect the vulnerable. Expose wrongdoing. Seek solutions.”

WHAT SOURCES WILL YOU NEED?

For proof, context, color. Are they possible, probable or already in the bag? If you’re pitching audio or video, are they good talkers?

WHAT ARE THE UNKNOWNNS?

Does the story hinge on getting one cagey guy with no address to talk on the record? Might we have to sue an agency for key documents? Does the story require data analysis? How much work will you have to do before you’ll know for sure whether you have a story?

HOW MUCH WORK WILL THIS BE?

What’s your expected turnaround time, length? Any sidebars/extra features? Multimedia? Editors will want to know how much your story will cost them and when they will be able to publish it.

DO YOU HAVE THE SKILLS?

If your pitch is part of an application for the internship, we already have your resume. If you have a good story, the question we’ll be asking is, how do we know you can do this story? What kind of help will you need? For a story that is worth doing, we will fill in the gaps with our own staff resources, but we need to know what those gaps are.

WHAT'S BEEN DONE ON THIS SUBJECT?

Lots of people pitch us juicy, well-thought-out stories that we or others have already done. You may or may not include this explicitly in the pitch, but you should be prepared for our questions about it. Where did your idea come from? How does your story advance the state of knowledge in this area? What’s the likelihood you’ll get scooped before you finish?

DON'T BE BORING.

Really, this should be rule No. 1, and it’s a rule we try to follow ourselves, too. Sell us on your story. Your pitch is a chance to show off your writing as well as your thinking skills. What’s interesting about this story? Surprising?