



Perceptions of News-Academic Partnerships as a Sustainable Business Model

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Abstract:

This study examined the value of news-academic partnerships as an emerging collaborative journalism business model. Using the hierarchy of influences and experiential learning as a theoretical lens, this study questioned faculty and news managers about their involvement in news-academic partnerships, and their perceptions on building and sustaining the partnership for both the news organization and academic institution. This study found challenges but possible cost-benefits to implementing sustainable news-academic partnerships, heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Results from this study can be used by schools and news outlets to weigh the benefits and challenges of starting or continuing a news-academic partnership.

Project-based news collaborations are not new. But over the past 30 years, with continuous revenue declines (Greico, 2020) and newspaper closures (Abernathy, 2020/2018), news organizations in the U.S. have had to think beyond traditional business models in order to stay afloat (Glaser, 2020; Quackenbush, 2020; Ali & Radcliffe, 2017).

Widening Local News Gaps

The coronavirus pandemic has exploited already existing news gaps across the nation. Fifty-seven percent of the 2,485 U.S. counties that reported COVID-19 cases as of April 6 have no daily newspaper and 37% saw their local newspapers disappear between

2004 and 2019 (Hendrickson, 2020). Delays by the U.S. Postal Service and postage price increases amid the pandemic have delayed the newspaper delivery and threatened the existence of many small-town newspapers (Bogage, 2021). Existing local newsrooms continue to be among the hardest hit amid the persisting pandemic, yet they play a critical role in disseminating essential news – health-related or otherwise – within their respective communities. Specifically, declines in local news coverage impact public health. Many disease monitoring resources around the world rely on data from local newsrooms, suggesting that lack of community-level news coverage will make it difficult for epidemiologists to detect

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disease outbreaks (Harris, 2020).

Emergence of News-Academic Partnerships: One survival strategy some news organizations have employed is engaging in project-based and ongoing content-driven relationships with academic institutions. News-academic partnerships are rooted in collaborative journalism, a business model that embraces the “sharing of technologies, information, services, and practices through cooperative modes” between two or more entities (Martinez de la Serna, 2018, p.1), and is practiced by media organizations across platforms and of varying sizes (Center for Cooperative Media, 2019). In recent years, there has been an increased trend of college and university journalism programs partnering with local, regional, and national news outlets to produce and publish content.

The purpose of news-academic partnerships seems twofold: For universities, it is providing an experiential opportunity for students, and is serving as a pipeline for students to enter the media field. For media organizations, this partnership further establishes their presence within and commitment to the community and serves to fill gaps in news coverage given shrinking budgets and staff. Simply put, partnerships developed in collaboration with academic institutions seem to be critical to sustaining meaningful journalism, especially journalism that serves communities outside of elite news coverage areas.

Investing in Journalism Education and Local News: While media industry reports and theory-driven scholarship on news partnerships primarily focus on the impacts and outcomes of collaborations between professional news organization partnerships and heavily endowed philanthropic organizations (Alcorn, 2017), far less is known about partnerships involving academic institutions (Martinez de la Serna, 2018) – what we define as news-academic partnerships.

In some cases, news-academic partnerships have received philanthropic support by journalism nonprofits, industry organizations and media-based foundations. These entities seek out partnerships between universities and news organizations and fund collaborative ways of delivering news to local communities (Online News Association, 2020). These major funding opportunities, however, only account for a small number of news-academic partnerships that exist. In most cases, partnerships form organically between the academic institution and the community’s news outlet, either through a faculty or a department-led initiative, or by discussions led by the local news entity.

It is worth exploring whether news organizations find such investments to be worthwhile.

Conceptual Framework

Hierarchy of Influences: This research is guided by Shoemaker and Reese’s (2014) Hierarchy of Influences model, which posits that news and its production is influenced by internal and external constraints. Specifically, the researchers draw upon routines as a level of analysis – how news workers do their jobs through routine practices, such as editorial decision-making and reporting. A considerable amount of scholarship explores the routine practices of journalists and media organizations (Tuchman, 1978; Fishman, 1980; Schudson, 1989; Dunwoody, 1997; Berkowitz, 2009). News-academic partnerships provide a guided structure for student-led news production within an already established organization. Student-reporters are expected to follow editorial guidance of news outlets, as they understand the editorial routine of the profession.

The research also takes into consideration Shoemaker and Reese’s (2014) perspective that news production is influenced by the economic goals of a media organization – retaining audiences, maintaining advertising revenues, balancing budgets, and ownership – to determine what is news and how it gets presented (Roach, 1979; Epstein, 1973; Tunstall, 1971; Lacy, 1991; Soley & Craig, 1992; Eliasoph, 1997; Bagdikian, 2004; Craig, 2004). News-academic partnerships can be seen as a way to restore diverse news coverage and its presentation as the industry contends with structural and economic changes.

Experiential Learning: Experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) – otherwise known as learning-by-doing or the hospital model approach – is an effective and sought after contemporary method of learning in highly specialized fields including journalism. To retain fundamental and abstract concepts of a discipline, students undergo concrete experiences and produce content through a process of active experimentation. This high level of engagement allows students to internalize concepts and offers a level of self-reflection critical to learning. When applied in a news-academic partnership, such a model would allow students to translate editorial concepts taught within the classroom into field work, with the ultimate goal of providing students a transformative learning experience. At the macro level, such an experience could build connections between academia and industry.

At the individual-student level, these opportunities bridge connections between classroom learning. They also provide the opportunity to exercise their acquired skill sets.

Drawing upon the theoretical perspectives outlined above, this study sought to understand the benefits and challenges of partnerships between courses or media that reside in academic institutions and established news media outlets across the U.S. The study also examined perceptions of these partnerships as a business model for media organizations that are facing shortages in personnel and resources that are significantly hampering their ability to adequately report on local communities. Our study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ #1: What is/are the most prominent structure(s) of the news-academic partnership model?

RQ #2: What are the perceived challenges of maintaining a news-academic partnership?

RQ #3: What elements have contributed to the sustainability of the news-academic partnership model?

RQ #4: To what extent are news-academic partnerships viewed as economically sustainable business models?

Methodology

To help understand the histories, structures, and benefits and challenges of news-academic partnerships, we conducted an online survey in which participants were asked open-ended and closed-ended questions about their involvement in one or more news-academic partnership(s), and their perceptions of the benefits and challenges of building and sustaining the partnership for both the news outlet and academic institution.

For this survey, we recruited participants through Facebook, targeting communication and journalism interest groups, email listservs, and direct email contact with journalism educators and news editors who were identified as possibly being involved in a news-academic partnership. Eligible participants needed to self-identify as a faculty member at an academic institution and/or a journalist or editor at a news organization directly involved in the news-academic partnership. In all, 50 total participants accessed the survey. However, only 36 of those participants were eligible to complete the entire survey after reporting “yes” to the survey’s initial question: “Is your

institution/organization currently participating in a news/academic partnership?”

Participants were asked to describe their affiliation with their current respective news-academic partnership(s) in place using the following categories: full-time faculty; program manager from academic institution; program manager from news organization; journalist/editor; and/or adjunct faculty. Respondents could identify as having more than one role. The majority of respondents identified as a full-time faculty member.

Confidentiality was ensured to participants as per the guidelines of Endicott College’s Institutional Review Board, which approved the human subjects research for this exploratory study.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the responses to the closed-ended questions. We asked questions regarding the partnership structure, the length of partnership(s), and the respondents’ role in the program. We also asked about the output of the program, the operation costs and perceived financial benefits. Participants were also asked about their perceived benefits and detriments to sustaining a partnership. We also asked open-ended questions concerning partnership benefits, implementation challenges, and strategies to strengthen their partnership(s). We inductively analyzed the open-ended questions in order to help us identify thematic patterns.

A complete copy of the survey is provided in Appendix A.

Findings

While some news-academic partnerships have been in place for more than a decade, collaboration initiatives have reportedly increased within the last five years. Participants in this study reported being involved in at least one news-academic partnership. In some cases ($n = 5$) an academic institution was simultaneously involved in four or more partnerships. Fourteen percent ($n = 4$) have been involved in a partnership for less than one academic year. Half of respondents ($n = 14$) reported being involved in the partnership for 1 to 5 academic years; Thirty-six percent ($n = 10$) reported being involved in their partnership(s) for six academic years or more. A majority of the partnerships studied ($n = 27$) were initiated by the academic institution.

News-academic partnership models are not monolithic. Differing universities present differing models, sometimes differing between courses within those universities.

The most common structure for the partnership was a co-curricular model, meaning that it resided either within the confines of a recurring course, or as a “directed study.” The directed study model involves one or a small number of students directed by a faculty working on at least one project committed to be published or broadcast by the partnering news organization. Both of these structures offered some form of academic credit for students. Additionally, the partnership was structured as an extracurricular opportunity, perhaps with student media, such as a college newspaper or television station. Or, the partnership was coordinated through a news media or wire service formed by the academic program. There were two common focuses for partnerships: (1) news content collaborations between an academic program and one or more newsrooms; (2) partnerships involving the creation and testing of innovative storytelling technology/products.

Regardless of structure, study participants strongly indicated they felt the partnership was extremely beneficial to the students (91%; *n* = 23), the academic institution (69%; *n* = 18), the news organization (62%; *n* = 15), and the community (41%; *n* = 10) (Table 1.1).

Perceived Benefits of

News-Academic Partnerships

Student Experience: Overall, study participants articulated that news-academic partnerships offer “practical experience for students.” For many programs, students gain professional experience working directly with editors or staff members of the news outlet, and students in general are perceived to be motivated to participate. These sentiments are reflected in the following qualitative responses, which are representative of similar responses by other participants:

It gives students the opportunity to work as reporters.

The students tend to work harder and longer

than many of the full-time staffers.

Partnerships were also regarded as a possible recruitment tool for employers. Specifically, faculty involved in the news-academic partnership regarded the program as a possible pipeline from students’ academic to professional career. “Several have gone on to paid fellowships and staff positions...” one respondent wrote. Reportedly, students also receive immediate feedback for their work, beyond assignments submitted to their instructor. The opportunity, “gives them real life experience in getting up to a standard and facing rejection if they have done a half-ass job.” One faculty participant responded: “It gives the students more ‘real world’ experience, guided by professionals in addition to faculty, and it extends their network of contacts.” Works published in news outlets are “very valuable to our students and their resumes,” another respondent wrote.

Program managers on the news organization side of the partnership consider student participation to be the resounding strength of their respective partnership(s). One respondent said student participation “adds diversity to local newsrooms.” The same respondent continued, the partnership “helps secure the next generation of journalists.”

Beyond Student Media

While student media on many campuses are limited to covering issues on campus, news-academic partnerships may be one method to provide an opportunity for students to expand their practice beyond the student media available on campus. As evident in these responses, participants found expanded coverage of issues within and beyond the campus offered an added benefit to the professional experience:

[The partnership] allowed for more comprehensive coverage of the campus than the student media outlet can afford.

...gives students the chance to work for edi-

Table 1.1: Partnership Benefits

Statement: To what extent is the partnership beneficial to ... (*n* = 26):

Collaborator	Extremely beneficial	Somewhat beneficial	Unsure	Not at all beneficial	Total
Academic institution	18	7	1	0	26
News organization	15	7	2	0	24
Community the news outlet serves	10	9	5	0	24
Participating students	21	1	1	0	23

Table 1.2: Contributions to News Organization
 Statement: Please select the types of ways you think the partnership has contributed to the news organization (n = 24):

Types of contributions	Total
Financial	6
Personnel	15
Equipment	3
News coverage	21
Community engagement	16
Training	6
Other	2

tors in the real world on issues of public policy, rather than covering the campus community and being edited by their peers in our student media operation.”

The types of stories they may cover for the program are what one respondent describes as “stories they otherwise would not see” had they been limited to student media that primarily provides coverage of the students’ respective campus.

News Coverage and Innovation

An estimated 21.74% of respondents reported “personnel” as a contribution that academic institutions make to the partnership, suggesting student participation is a perceived benefit to partnering news organizations because the collaborations were described as “supplementing coverage” (Table. 1.2). Specifically for local or hyperlocal news outlets, collaborations were seen as supplementing and also filling gaps in news coverage. Also, partnerships that served the immediate community are seen as ways to expand local news. “Our region gets better local news coverage,” one respondent wrote. One faculty respondent stated: “we’re a big chunk of his reporting power,” referencing the news organization. The same respondent described an in-depth news project, adding: “The total package was much more thorough than our media partner could produce on their own.”

Student-produced work seemed to provide updated content presentations for audiences and filled news gaps. 30.43% of respondents reported “news coverage” was a contribution of the partnership while

23.19% reported “community engagement” was a benefit of the partnership (Table 1.2).

Community engagement was often perceived by respondents as content creation defined as “news you can use,” whereby news presented calls to action for audiences (i.e. something they could do in their community) and/or physical interaction through storytelling technology.

In some cases, collaborations between newsrooms and academic programs were also reported to provide innovative storytelling methods to news outlets that may otherwise not have the time, staffing or budget to do so. While 4.35% reported “equipment” as a contribution by academic institutions to news organizations, the contributions were also cited to be innovative storytelling techniques that generated emerging technology awareness in newsrooms or producing content that incorporated that technology (Table 1.2). One news partner described the students they collaborate with as, “emerging journalists who have skills in new technologies and new energy which inform our newsroom.” Or, as one faculty respondent cited creating content for national news organizations that partnered with the academic institution: “We built AR [augmented reality] experiences they could not do on their own.”

Academic Institution Boosterism

Some respondents reported that the news-academic partnership serves as an opportunity to promote the academic institution’s journalism program to the public. Specifically, one respondent wrote:

This has been a way to showcase the work of the department on a larger scale in the community in which our university is located.”

The partnership is also used as a possible recruitment tool for prospective students, a sentiment shared by multiple respondents:

While our primary goal with this partnership is to benefit students, it also allows us to market our college as a place where students can get bylines in professional news organizations. It allows us to demonstrate to prospective students our ability to get student work published by a professional news outlet. [The news outlet also serves as a platform to] gain exposure for our student work.

The partnership is also perceived to “extend the brand” of the institution’s department or program in the eyes of the partnering news organization, and pos-

sibly others. According to one respondent: “it helps us keep a decent relationship with the organization so they don’t keep telling us we don’t understand ‘the real world.’”

Perceived Challenges of News-Academic Partnerships

Although many of the challenges encountered within programs are systemic to news organizations and academic institutions, the 2020 coronavirus pandemic has certainly exacerbated many program operations.

Misaligned Expectations and Goals: While students reportedly intended to benefit the greatest from news-academic partnerships, there are also challenges in finding a balance between treating the program as an academic learning opportunity and meeting professional standards for public-facing works. A lack of “coordination of communication,” one respondent wrote – likely between students, and partners from both the news and academic side on the expectation of the program – is among the reported challenges in a news-academic partnership.

In many programs, faculty are expected to hold students accountable for their participation, either through a grade, feedback, and/or allowing for continuation of their participation. Respondents said one of the biggest challenges is having some student work rise to the professional standard necessary for news organizations to accept, broadcast, or publish the work. One respondent wrote:

The biggest challenge is in convincing students that their work must not only be acceptable to their professors but also to the organizations for which they’re working.

This was especially the case for respondents who reported their partnerships were housed within a course. In that case, faculty may not have been able to select the participants of the program. One such respondent reported the biggest challenge was “keeping underperforming students on track. Many times, they seem to believe that their underperformance only impacts their grades in the course.”

In many cases, the news-academic partnership is likely not the only initiative students are involved in. One respondent wrote: “Students have to juggle classes, paid jobs, and work with the organizations,” with the expectation by the news organization that they will produce quality work that meets the standard for publication.

One news partner wrote:

...students’ schedules and course loads, etc. don’t always mirror the pace of news and our newsroom staffing. So there can be a misalignment and frustration on the part of staff journalists who need to move things along.

The burden on faculty overseeing the partnership was also a reported challenge. One respondent reported the workload as “very labor-intensive,” and citing the real risk of “faculty burnout.” Simply put, as one respondent wrote, “[The partnership] requires a considerable investment of time.”

Differences in Perceived Cost-Benefits: Depending on the program structure, students involved in a news-academic partnership may be required to do many of the same tasks as an entry-level reporter. These tasks may involve researching, pitching, writing and producing news stories. A majority of participants from news outlets (57.14%) reported that the average salary of their entry-level reporters was \$29,000 or less. However, for a majority of the programs studied (n=21), students are not paid. Since a majority provide no financial compensation to students, in some cases students may be regarded as interns or the program could count as for-credit internship experience.

Unpaid contributions by students were generally regarded as a benefit in the partnership structure. A themed phrase used in the qualitative data was “free labor.” One faculty respondent wrote: “They get our motivated, ambitious and hard-working students – free.” However, financial compensation can be regarded as one method to increase student accountability and motivate them to deliver quality work. One respondent wrote:

A student [can] do C-level work in a class and get by but that does not work for a pro news org. But when students are paid, they have to deliver.

Those who reported their students do receive financial compensation, said they primarily receive \$8.50/hour to \$12/hour. The funding structure (i.e. where the money comes from) varies by program. The respondents reported the following sources of funding: the news organization involved in the partnership; the academic institution; private donations; or grants. In one instance, one respondent said the news organization was responsible for funding for the creation and testing of new technologies in storytelling. It is unclear whether students were compensated and, if so, which entity provided funding for student compensation.

Both staffing and cost are important consider-

Table 1.3:

Cost Save/Financial Gain to News Organization

Statement: Please provide an estimated cost save or financial gain to the news organization from this partnership since its establishment (n=23):

Amount in dollars	Total
Less than \$10,000	8
\$10,000 - \$19,999	3
\$20,000 - \$29,999	0
\$30,000 - \$39,999	0
\$40,000 - \$49,999	1
\$50,000 - \$59,999	0
\$60,000 - \$69,999	0
\$70,000 - \$79,999	0
\$80,000 - \$89,999	0
\$90,000 - \$99,000	0
\$100,000 - \$149,000	0
More than \$150,000	1
I don't know	9

ations for participating news outlets and academic institutions. 8.7% of total respondents referenced the partnership as a “financial” benefit to the news organization while 21.7% reported “personnel” as a contribution of the partnership. The partnership was perceived by many respondents as a way for news organizations to, as a respondent wrote, “extend its budget” by benefiting from the partnership’s contributions. Several respondents described the partnership as a content generator for shrinking staffed and financially strapped newsrooms. One respondent wrote:

It gives them more reporters at a time when most local media outlets are under severe financial stress.

Free and affordability as themes to reference work and content provided by students was mentioned six times in the course of qualitative responses. One respondent stated that the partnership could not exist as a paid structure:

Without our students working as unpaid interns, the affiliate would be unable to staff this bureau.

Despite qualitative analysis suggesting there is financial benefit to participating news outlets, respondents from news organizations were split on their

regard of these partnerships as a cost-saving model for either the news outlet or the academic institution (Table 1.3). One respondent wrote:

“Funding is always the challenge for extracurricular partnerships and fitting it into the curriculum for class-based programs.”

Time Investment

News-academic partnerships also require significant time investment from each partnering entity, especially students. If partnerships are expected to be learning opportunities for students, time investment by newsroom personnel to work with students is a critical component, yet regarded as one of the biggest challenges. News partners were more likely to report time as a major challenge. One news partner wrote:

...the news organization, which is already understaffed, has to take on the additional task of editing young writers who have little or no professional experience. It’s time-consuming.

Collaborations have also shifted a bit in meaning amid the coronavirus pandemic. Students who work in close proximity with journalists within the newsroom have reportedly been limited to working remotely. One respondent wrote: “COVID-19 has greatly impacted the news outlet and its ability to work closely with our students.”

Despite the possible cost benefit, some news organizations cannot invest the time and resources needed to carry through a collaborative project. One respondent wrote:

The legacy local news outlets are having a really hard time using our (free) labor, I think because they’re already so time challenged and can’t manage more than one thing... They’re willing to partner, they’re just not able.

One academic participant in our survey states financial cutbacks have meant that participating news outlets, “have fewer people to mentor our students.”

Another respondent wrote:

Sadly, our longest-term relationship with our state’s largest news organization came to an end a few years ago – they had laid off so many reporters and editors, they simply did not have anyone left to mentor our students.

Discussion

The findings of this study expand the already-established sociology of news and experiential scholarship by applying the theories to an understudied collab-

orative journalism model. Specifically, these findings show news organizations participate in the partnerships to expand their editorial footprint and find the collaborative approach potentially economically beneficial. This aligns with Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) "Hierarchy of Influences" model that suggests news production is influenced by both editorial and economic objectives. Therefore, news-academic partnerships can fill possible reporting gaps while also serving as an added funding pillar, which ultimately relieves organizational constraints.

Local newsrooms have struggled for years because of revenue declines and increasing digital competition. To help combat the hardships, local news organizations across the nation are turning to nearby academic institutions to form news-academic partnerships to collaborate on news production – providing news outlets with additional staff and technological resources while helping colleges and universities provide their students with experiential learning opportunities not available in classrooms. The most prominent partnership structure reported was one that involved a single news organization collaborating with students within the premise of an academic course (RQ1).

Despite the benefits of the news-academic partnerships, local news organizations were presented with a new challenge in early 2020 (RQ2). The COVID-19 pandemic has created additional economic, staffing, and logistical hardships. It is not yet clear what the numerical implications of the persisting pandemic will be on local news organizations in the U.S., including how many will shutter, but one thing is certain: the coronavirus pandemic exploited the existing news gaps across the country. As previously noted, more than half of the 2,485 U.S. counties that reported COVID-19 cases as of April 6 have no daily newspaper (Hendrickson, 2020).

While respondents of this study reported that partnerships provided the opportunity to fill gaps in news coverage, some of the partnerships have been tested by the challenges of the pandemic. Pivoting to remote working has limited interactions – and possibly natural mentorship opportunities – between students and partnering members with the news organization. Our findings suggest coronavirus-related financial cuts have led to newsroom staff cuts, impacted production schedules, and may threaten the sustainability of some existing partnerships.

In an era in which local news organizations continue to close, our findings suggest news-academic

partnerships may serve as a lifeline to news organizations. Partnerships can also leverage students' motivations, abilities and time to provide deeper, meaningful content to news outlets and their respective audiences.

The findings reveal multiple elements contribute to the sustainability of a news-academic partnership (RQ3). Our findings suggest the partnership can be regarded as beneficial regardless of the size of the participating academic institution or the news outlet. Partnerships examined in this study ranged from small private to large public academic institutions partnering with small to large news outlets in any medium. The collaborative projects also ranged in all depths and various durations. This suggests news-academic partnerships are accessible to any community.

The findings of this study also align with the Kolb's (1984) experiential learning interpretive lens found in academia. Specifically, the findings presented suggest academic institutions value the learning-by-doing approach that these partnerships offer. News-academic partnerships provide transformative learning experiences for students, which ultimately prepare students for a stronger transition to a newsroom environment upon graduation. In the long-term, better trained students could be a cost-saving measure for news organizations. A future study should link news organizations' size and location to understand the direct impact of these partnerships on specific types of outlets.

Some of the benefits of news-academic partnerships include: providing insight to faculty and students to the workings of a professional newsroom; bypassing limits of internship programs; improving students' resumes; serving as exposure for academic institutions; attracting investment for academic programs; and diversifying local news coverage. However, our study found the larger challenges to the news industry may not be addressed in these programs (i.e. filling news gaps, creating alternative sustainable news business model).

While this study could not quantify a dollar-to-dollar return on an investment (RQ4), academics who are involved in the partnerships view the exposure and experience students gain from their partnership as a clear return on the investment for students, as well as for the participating academic institution. Participants who manage the news side of the news-academic partnership were more likely to report the time spent working with students and their contribution to the partnership as a costly endeavor.

It is interesting to note that while participants

found their partnership(s) extremely beneficial to the academic institution, students, and news organizations, more participants reported that the partnership was only “somewhat beneficial” to the community. This finding is interesting considering many news-academic partnerships tout filling a gap in areas underserved by news outlets and have been suggested as possible lifelines to community journalism and civic engagement. Our findings suggest those involved in partnerships have yet to measure whether communities they serve are benefitting as much as students and the institutional partnerships.

Despite the challenges reported, 83% of participants said they do not plan to eliminate the current partnership in place. Furthermore, 56% said they may establish additional news-academic partnerships.

Limitations and Future Research

Our exploratory study sought to understand the most common structures of a news-academic partnership and the overall perceived benefits and challenges. The findings presented suggest there is room for more inquiry into operational and logistical sustainability of news-academic partnerships.

Most of the respondents of this survey were affiliated with the partnership through the academic side, either as a full-time or adjunct faculty member and/or the program manager from the academic institution. Further research should seek to garner more responses from program managers from the news organization side of the partnership to gain more insight into the benefits and challenges of the partnership for news organizations, the funding structure of partnerships, and whether some news organizations consider these partnerships to be an added revenue stream and sustainable business model. This study also suggests that while news outlets and academic institutions benefit from the partnership, benefits to the community have yet to be measured. The findings of this study warrant a follow-up audience perception study.

A clearer picture of the demographics of the academic institution such as the demographic of its students, resources available to the academic program and the financial structure of the academic program is also merited and would offer insight on the components from the academic side to sustain a partnership. Future research should compare rural to urban news-academic partnerships to address whether these partnerships are filling information gaps in known news deserts across the country.

Our study did not measure students’ perception of the benefits and challenges of participating in a news-academic partnership. Future research should include participating students’ perceptions and recommendations to strengthen the partnership programs in order to garner a holistic perspective of this type of journalistic collaboration model.

Further understanding of the news-academic partnership is critical as a strategy for sustaining ongoing and meaningful modes of storytelling amid an already strapped news environment. While our study clearly shows there are some misalignments noted among participating entities, the findings suggest overcoming collaboration challenges could theoretically position academic institutions and news organizations – regardless of size and scope -- to build a sustainable business model in journalism.

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Appendix A

Is your institution/organization currently participating in a news/academic partnership?

- Yes
- No

The partnership was initiated by:

- News organization
- Academic institution

How many partnerships is your institution/organization currently participating in?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

What role(s) best describe(s) you in relation to the partnership program (check all that apply):

- Full-Time Faculty
- Program manager from academic institution
- Program manager from news organization
- Journalist/Editor
- Adjunct Faculty

How long has your institution/organization been involved in the current partnership in place?

- Less than 1 academic year
- 1 - 5 academic years
- 6 - 10 academic years
- More than 10 academic years

What is the average entry-level salary for a reporter at the news outlet involved in the partnership?

- 0-\$29,000
- \$30,000 - \$50,000
- \$51,000 - \$70,000
- > \$71,000
- I don't know

What does the partnership structure look like (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY):

- The partnership resides within the confines of a recurring course
- The partnership resides with an extracurricular student media
- The partnership resides with an academic institution's news media service
- The partnership is a "directed study" involving one or a small number of students and a journalist as faculty working on one story to be published by the journalist's affiliated news outlet.
- Other

Are students paid for their contribution to the partnership?

- Yes
- No

How much are students paid?

Where does the money come from?

To what extent is the partnership beneficial to the academic institution?

- Extremely beneficial
- Somewhat beneficial
- Unsure
- Not at all beneficial

In what ways is this partnership not beneficial to the academic institution?

Describe some ways this partnership has been beneficial to the academic institution.

To what extent is the partnership beneficial to the news organization?

- Extremely beneficial
- Somewhat beneficial
- Unsure
- Not at all beneficial

In what ways is this partnership not beneficial to the news organization?

Describe some ways this partnership has been beneficial to the news organization.

To what extent is the partnership beneficial to the community the news outlet serves?

- Extremely beneficial
- Somewhat beneficial
- Unsure
- Not at all beneficial

To what extent is the partnership beneficial to participating students?

- Extremely beneficial
- Somewhat beneficial
- Unsure
- Not at all beneficial

Describe any major challenges you encountered during the course of implementing your particular partnership model.

Please select the types of ways you think the partnership has contributed to the news organization?

- Financial
- Personnel
- Equipment
- News coverage
- Community engagement
- Training
- Other

How much has the news organization benefitted financially from this partnership?

- A great deal
- A lot
- A moderate amount
- A little
- None at all

Please provide an estimated cost save or financial gain to the news organization from this partnership since its establishment:

- Less than \$10,000
- \$10,000 - \$19,999
- \$20,000 - \$29,999
- \$30,000 - \$39,999
- \$40,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$59,999
- \$60,000 - \$69,999
- \$70,000 - \$79,999
- \$80,000 - \$89,999
- \$90,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000 - \$149,999
- More than \$150,000
- I don't know

How are you, your institution, and/or organization working to strengthen the current partnership in place?

Do you plan to add another partnership?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Do you plan to eliminate the current partnership

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Lara Salahi is a journalist, author and educator who is focused on creating sustainable higher education journalism programs and building connections between academia and industry. Lara has worked in local news, network and cable television, international print and documentary film and her work has been published in and broadcast on numerous news outlets worldwide. Her research explores professionalization models to approach journalism education, and standardizing skills among practicing journalists.

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