



**NEWS21:  
AN ANALYSIS  
OF IMPACT**

Dr. Debora Wenger, Dr. Jason Cain and Dr. Iveta Imre



**KNIGHT  
FOUNDATION**

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>News21 Background</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Impact on Students</b>
5	Career Trajectory
8	Elevated Skill Areas
9	Culture and Climate
10	Long-term Impact
<b>13</b>	<b>Effect on the Journalism Profession</b>
13	Quality Journalism Provider
14	Measuring Impact
16	Fostering Innovation
<b>19</b>	<b>Impact on Curriculum</b>
21	The Cost Concern
<b>23</b>	<b>Program Evolution and Future</b>
24	Conclusion: What Next?
<b>26</b>	<b>Appendix A</b>
<b>28</b>	<b>Appendix B</b>
<b>30</b>	<b>References</b>

# Executive Summary

In 2011, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation committed funding for Arizona State University (ASU) to operate the News21 in-depth digital journalism program. Since 2011, more than 360 students from more than 40 universities have taken part in the program. Participants have produced more than 260 stories, many with multimedia elements, and, in one year alone, 89 different news organizations published News21 content.

The goal of this program review is to assess whether ASU's stewardship of News21 has met the objectives set forth in the original agreement. The review team was charged with determining if News21 has been able to:

- Facilitate employment at higher rates for graduates;
- Facilitate employment in positions where graduates would be able to innovate;
- Be recognized by news outlets as a trusted provider of quality journalism;
- Prompt participating universities to innovate within their curricula;
- Prompt participating news outlets to innovate in their newsrooms.

The researchers combined survey results from News21 alumni and in-depth interviews with stakeholders, including alumni, journalism program administrators, newsroom partners and representatives from the Knight Foundation, The Miami Foundation and ASU.

Key research findings related to the original program objectives include:

- Just over 88% of alumni survey respondents indicated they have previously worked or remain working in journalism—64% reported that they currently hold jobs in news organizations. Alumni said that participating in News21 was helpful in searching for employment after graduation and in networking throughout their careers.
- The program's newsroom partners universally confirmed that News21 is a trusted provider of quality journalism. News21 content has garnered dozens of awards in some of the most prestigious journalism competitions.
- Journalism program administrators said News21 does not directly impact their curricula, but they value what the initiative offers students. They also indicated that the price of the program was a concern. The current cost of supporting each fellow is approximately \$22,000, but the amount schools must pay to send a student to News21 (\$11,500) is beyond the reach of many schools, including historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).
- There was little direct evidence that News21 fosters innovation in partner newsrooms. Many news partners tend to be industry leaders in innovation in their own right. However, 84% of alumni reported News21 made them more innovative in their approach to journalism and multiple News21 projects have received awards for use of innovative techniques.

The alumni questionnaire and in-depth interviews revealed some additional results relevant to the assessment of News21. These findings cover the topics of skills enhancement, the culture and climate of News21, the long-term effect of News21 on journalism careers and the impact of the journalism produced.

Survey results indicated that the skills most enhanced by participating in News21 were either soft skills like teamwork or personal traits like creativity. Participants who said they are able to innovate on the job mentioned data journalism skills as being most helpful in those efforts.

When asked to evaluate the cultural climate within the News21 program, the participants indicated a generally favorable view of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) within News21, though some stakeholders suggested that DEI efforts should be more intentionally highlighted.

Alumni seem to especially value personal connections fostered by News21 and several suggested that the program should create a more formalized network that would allow graduates to stay connected to ASU and each other throughout their lives.

Academic research and interviews with News21's publishing partners suggest that assessing the impact of News21's journalism is difficult and is a challenge shared by the entire industry. Determining the appropriate impact metrics to collect and analyze is key if this becomes a primary objective for the future.

Finally, the researchers make four recommendations:

1. Involve administrators from partner schools in discussions about the program's future and institutionalize procedures that might promote more impact on curricula. For example, prioritize participants who will return to their home schools for at least a year or invite faculty from schools that send students to the program to serve as teaching assistants in News21.
2. Double down on finding new types of partners to publish News21 content and consider involving interested partners earlier in the process. Incorporate a regional component in which partner schools could report on the same topic as the primary News21 cohort and offer that content to regional news outlets.
3. If innovation goals remain as objectives, what constitutes innovation should be better defined, benchmarks should be set and thorough assessment should be built into annual reviews.
4. Explore how the program could build on existing diversity, equity and inclusion efforts to identify and mitigate any barriers to selection or participation. Develop closer relationships with HBCUs and other schools with large enrollments of underserved populations. Better understand why women and men have different views on how diverse perspectives are valued in the program.

Our research suggests that News21 has been instrumental in nurturing journalism careers through the production of quality work. There is room for improvement as the program seeks to more fully achieve the original objectives of its funders.

# NEWS21: An Analysis of Impact

## News21 Background

News21 is now in its 16th year of bringing together top journalism students from across the country to report and produce in-depth, multimedia projects for publication in professional media outlets.

In 2005, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation funded and launched the program with 12 U.S. universities. News21 produced its first project in 2006 and Arizona State University (ASU) began coordinating the project in 2008.

A five-year assessment of the original program found the bulk of the work to be of high quality, was innovative in its approach to storytelling, design, interactivity and the use of data and had a positive impact on the curricula of the participating schools. The assessment offered two key recommendations: First, it was suggested that News21 look for opportunities to work with more tech-savvy news organizations so that the widgets and other coding-heavy features the participants were producing would get more usage. The assessment also indicated that News21 might adjust its website to include an “innovations menu,” featuring storytelling tools and approaches such as the use of questionnaires, inline video commenting and data walls.

In 2011, Carnegie and Knight decided on a new approach, and selected ASU to operate the News21 in-depth digital journalism program for 10 years. Knight's support for the program has been funded through a \$2.1 million donor-advised fund (valued in 2020 at \$2.46 million) that provides sustaining support for the initiative with a grant of \$100,000 per year. The move also opened News21 to all journalism schools. That change has paved the way for a more diverse cohort of News21 fellows each year but has also reduced the amount of participation among the original partner schools.

Expectations were as follows:

- News21 fellows from an expanded pool of schools will find jobs at higher rates than other journalism graduates and find the kinds of placement that will position them to lead the industry's transition to more impactful and innovative digital journalism.
- News21 fellows from the new growing pool of schools will develop and seek adoption of innovative ways of presenting news and information, fostering innovation in the industry.
- Professional journalism organizations will grow in awareness and acceptance of news content developed by News21 fellows as representative of the high-quality work of which journalism students and journalism schools are capable.
- Schools participating in News21 will create rich interdisciplinary collaborations within their universities as they immerse students in selected topics.
- Schools participating in News21 will spread News21 learning approaches within their curricula, and new journalism schools that participate will adopt similar approaches, helping to change the way journalism is taught.
- Additional funds will be raised to increase the scholarship pool for News21 fellows.
- The fund will continue to support innovations in journalism education responsive to technological changes and new industry demands.
- After 10 years, The Miami Foundation and the Knight Foundation will review the effectiveness of the News21 program and decide whether the fund should continue to support it or whether other projects in journalism education might be more innovative.

By 2021, approximately 40 additional partner schools had students take part in News21, many over the course of multiple years. Administrators from partner schools typically select student participants based on superior skills and achievements, as does ASU. The ASU website details the structure of the program:

Students selected for the News21 program study a topic in-depth during a spring video-conferenced topics seminar, followed by a 10-week reporting fellowship during the summer. Students work out of a newsroom at the Cronkite School and travel the country—and sometimes to other countries—to report and produce their projects.

Topics for the projects have included voting rights, hate crimes and guns in America, among others, and student work has been published in dozens of national, regional and local news outlets. (Appendix A includes a full list of projects and descriptions.) Since 2013, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Jacquee Petchel has led the program.

The goal of this program review is to assess whether or not ASU's stewardship of News21 has met the objectives set forth in the original funding agreement. The review team was charged with determining whether, over the past 10 years, News21 has been able to:

- Facilitate employment at higher rates for graduates;
- Facilitate employment in positions where graduates would be able to innovate;
- Be recognized by news outlets as a trusted provider of quality journalism;
- Prompt participating universities to innovate within their curricula;
- Prompt participating news outlets to innovate in their newsrooms.

The research design included:

- Survey results from News21 alumni participating from 2009 to 2020 whose contact information we obtained from ASU's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communications, as well as through LinkedIn and internet searches.
- Interviews with 34 stakeholders: 22 participants, 4 journalism program administrators, representatives from 4 newsroom partners and 4 representatives in total from the Knight Foundation (KF), The Miami Foundation (TMF) and ASU.
- Review of annual endowment reports, scholarly research on valid measures for program review and the process of measuring journalism impact.

The report includes four sections that assess the impact of ASU's News21 initiative on students, journalism education and the journalism ecosystem more broadly, along with a discussion about the future of the program.

## Impact on Students

One primary goal of ASU's News21 program was to help participants find jobs at higher rates than other journalism graduates. A survey of News21 alumni asked them to describe their career paths and to assess the value of News21 in facilitating their job hunts. In addition, the following sections include excerpts from in-depth interviews, which helped us capture the participants' perceptions of the effect that the News21 experience had on their development as journalists, including soft and hard skills and on their ability to succeed long-term in the industry.

### **Brittany Brown**

**Criminal Justice Reporter, Gulf States Newsroom**

Brittany Brown is a criminal justice reporter for Gulf States Newsroom, a regional collaboration between NPR and member stations in Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana. Based in Jackson, Mississippi, Brown covers criminal justice issues in all three states. Brown graduated from the University of Mississippi in 2019 with a journalism degree and is working on finishing her master's degree in Southern Studies there. She said getting accepted into the News21 program was a proud moment in her early journalism career.



"I was like, wow, okay, I guess there is something on paper about me that people are interested in. And it was the year before my senior year of journalism school, [so it] really helped me see the powerful work that I can do in journalism," Brown said.

Brown participated in News21 in 2018 and worked on the "Hate in America" project, which examined intolerance, racism and hate crimes. Participants that year also produced a five-episode podcast and a documentary that won the 2019 Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award. Brown said this experience helped build her confidence.

"In hindsight, I feel like I had a lot of the skills, but News21 really pushed me to see what it is that I could accomplish," she said.

Brown credits News21 for helping her use the skills she learned in the classroom to develop as a journalist.

"I don't think I would pay as much attention to detail or all of these additional things that I'm thinking about all the time now if I did not have that News21 experience, and so it's been very impactful. Very, very impactful," she said.

## Career Trajectory

More than 250 students have participated in News21 since 2009, and 51% completed a comprehensive survey regarding their News21 experience. The vast majority (88%) of those who responded currently work in journalism or have worked in journalism in the past. Many report highly successful careers that included first jobs as reporters for local TV news or newspaper outlets, entry-level positions for news networks such as NBC or ABC, or employment as producers for TV newscasts or digital platforms. (Table 1 lists respondents' first jobs upon completion of News21.)

It is difficult to determine, however, whether News21 has helped fellows find jobs at higher rates than other journalism graduates. There appears to be no good source of current data on the number of U.S. graduates with journalism degrees who go on to work in the profession. The [Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates](#) was last fielded in 2013. At that time, the researchers reported that 82.5% of "news-editorial" graduates found jobs in the editorial specialty. In addition,

News21 generally accepts only top journalism students from ASU and around the country—students who have already shown dedication to the craft and a talent for the work, so it seems natural that they would be more likely to go into the field.

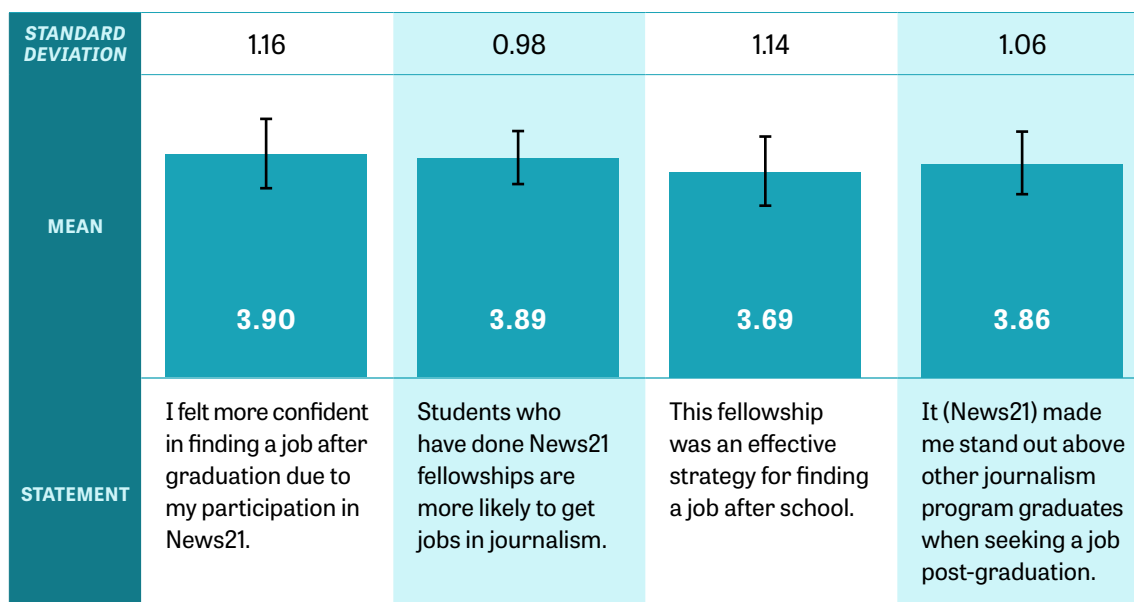
Table 1: Breakdown of First Jobs after News21

POSITION	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Reporter	38	33%
Producer	18	16%
Internship	13	11%
Other	11	9%
Editor	8	7%
Freelance Journalist	8	7%
None Given	6	5%
Staff Writer	4	3%
Multimedia Journalism	4	3%
Fellowship	4	3%
Photojournalist	2	2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>100%</b>

Positions such as Producer, Reporter and Internship include a variety of subgroupings within print journalism, broadcast and digital. Editor also includes a mix of editorial positions in broadcast, print and digital journalism.

Given those caveats, both survey results and the in-depth interviews indicate that alumni consider News21 an important element in their development as journalists and say the experience was helpful in searching for employment after graduation, but not necessarily a guarantee of employment (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Scores on Employment Statement



Respondents used a five-point scale to indicate their level of agreement with these statements. The scale items ranged from “Strongly Disagree” (coded as a score of 1) to “Strongly Agree” (coded as a score of 5). “Neither Agree nor Disagree” anchored the center of the scale and would equal a score of 3. Mean scores for all items fall within a range of 3.6 to 3.9, which corresponds most closely to an answer of “Somewhat Agree.”



Alumnus 1, who participated in News21 in 2020 and now works as a local government reporter, said that the program gave him great clips to talk about while interviewing for jobs.

“I think having it on the resume and having that project, and having the work that I did, I think that definitely helped,” Alumnus 1 said.

For others, such as Alumnus 8, a digital media manager who was a 2013 participant, the impact was in the networks participants created with peers or professionals they worked with who directly helped them find their first jobs.

“I mean, it fostered a ton of connections, not only with my News21 cohort, but sort of across News21 cohorts,” Alumnus 8 said.

Alumni also mentioned that News21 is very well known within professional circles.

“In an interview with Marty Baron for a job over at the *Post* that I didn’t end up taking . . . he had asked about the News21 project that I worked on, obviously, Len [Downie Jr.], being a longtime editor of the *Post*, you know, that’s a name that instantly gets recognized. And so, it’s certainly, I think, been a big advantage for me professionally,” Alumnus 8 said.

Alumni also said participating in News21 was a big confidence booster that prepared them for their first jobs because they learned how to do research, how to interview and how to put stories together on their own.

“Because of News21, you know, they taught us how to kind of just dive in someplace and tell these stories. And I feel like I would have struggled a lot more in my first job and not been prepared for what was ahead of me,” said Alumna 5, a 2016 participant who works as a researcher for a national media network in the U.S.

For many journalism students, newsroom internships provide an opportunity to acclimate to and experience “real world” working conditions. In the News21 survey, respondents were asked to score on a scale of 1 to 5 how much internship experiences and their News21 participation had helped with their professional development (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Impact of Internships and News21 on Professional Development

POSITION	MEAN	SD
Internship	4.26	0.95
News21	4.17	0.96

The lower the score, the less the perceived benefit.

Respondents indicated strong benefits from both internships and News21. This question was initially asked to discern to what degree each figured into a respondent’s professional development. In follow-up interviews, it became clear that News21 participants viewed these as very different experiences.

“With the internships . . . I was just sort of a part of the grind. Like I said, I was a part of trying to produce content, trying to keep things moving forward, trying to keep things fresh. I’ve never had an internship where there was this big goal in mind, we set out and found a way to execute it. So yeah, they don’t really compare,” said Alumnus 10.

Alumna 13 said that News21 offered more opportunities and more encouragement than a typical internship.

“Working in collaboration with a ton of people, it really was like my first true newsroom experience. I would just say it was a lot more immersive. It was a lot more thorough and more difficult, but also more rewarding,” she said.

There is ample evidence that News21 participants value their experience and consider it an asset when seeking employment in journalism. With 88% of survey respondents working or having worked in journalism following their News21 fellowships, it is safe to say that the program is helping to prepare these journalism students for the profession.

## Elevated Skill Areas

Those selected for News21 often come into the program with a solid skill set, though program administrators say not all are at the same level. This review was designed to determine the types of skills that News21 was developing or enhancing among its participants. Survey respondents reported that the News21 experience led to improved skills in several key areas (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: News21 Skill Area Development Scores

SKILL	MEAN	SD
Teamwork	4.33	0.96
Storytelling	4.26	0.92
Interviewing	4.04	0.91
Information Sourcing	4.03	0.98
Creativity	4.02	0.92
Confidence	3.99	1.09
Multimedia	3.84	1.25
Multitasking	3.75	1.17
Deadlines	3.74	1.21
Writing	3.73	1.14
Shooting Photo/Video	3.51	1.41
Leadership	3.47	1.20
Networking	3.47	1.22
Editing Photo/Video	3.18	1.46

Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the least, 5 the most) how much their News21 experience enhanced 14 skill areas. Lower scores do not indicate a lack of importance. This battery better demonstrates how skills rated against one another more than indicating the degree of impact News21 had on any one area. For example, though respondents generally felt their ability to work in a team was more greatly enhanced by participating in News21 than were their photo/video editing skills, this is not to say photo/video editing skills weren't also enhanced.

Participants reported that soft skills, such as teamwork and storytelling, or dimensions of personal development, such as increased confidence or creativity, were enhanced by the News21 experience.

Alumnus 7, a 2014 participant who works as a data visualization editor, said that News21 gave him the confidence and the skills to thrive moving forward.

“[News21] really, you know, set up a solid block for me to move forward with my career, and I really feel like it helped my career and me professionally,” he said.

Improved capabilities in information sourcing, which could include technical and soft skills, were also noted in the survey, and in conversations with alumni, interviewing skills were mentioned frequently. They felt that the News21 experience taught them how to conduct in-depth interviews, oftentimes on sensitive and difficult topics, how to ask open-ended questions and how to format an interview to get the most information out of it.

“It made me more patient. It made me listen better. It made me more empathetic, I think that was the biggest thing,” said Alumnus 2, a reporter and a 2019 participant.

Other skills referenced in the in-depth interviews included writing, video editing, photography, data visualization, learning how to manage time and how to organize material when working on big projects.

At least one alumna, however, expressed a desire for more emphasis on digital and social media skills.

“I know reporting is like the main part of News21, but I think giving people experience on how to use social media or how to use digital tools as a way to report can be very, very useful,” said Alumna 6, a social media editor who participated in 2016.

Teamwork, storytelling, interviewing, information sourcing, creativity and confidence were the skills most enhanced by the News21 program, according to the respondents. A future objective for the program might include targeting specific skills essential to positions in high demand within the industry to ensure those are fostered in participants.

## Culture and Climate

It has always been important for journalists to embrace diverse perspectives in order to ensure accuracy in their reporting, but recently, news organizations and journalism educators have put an increased emphasis on creating equitable and inclusive climates in the newsroom and the classroom.

When asked to evaluate the cultural climate within the News21 program, the participants surveyed indicated a generally favorable view of the manifestation of diversity, equity and inclusion within News21 (see Table 5).

Table 5: Diversity Scale Scores by Race/Ethnicity

STATEMENT	ALL	NON-HISPANIC WHITE	MINORITY
1. Within the News21 program, diverse perspectives are valued.	4.00	4.06	3.82
2. Faculty and mentors at News21 value diverse perspectives.	4.09	4.12	4.00
3. Overall, I felt News21 was an inclusive environment.	4.08	4.09	4.03

Due to the limited number of ethnic and racial minorities in the survey, all minority respondents in either or both categories were grouped together for greater statistical power. It should be noted that views may not be universal, and this should only be treated as an overall minority view, not a view specific to any of the minority groups in the survey. The ethnic/racial minority group includes 33 total participants who identified White Hispanic, Non-White Hispanic, Black or African American, Asian, and Other.

Alumni said that they enjoyed meeting people from diverse backgrounds and experiences who came together to work on a common goal.

“And they come from all different places around the world where they get taught how to do journalism differently. I mean, it’s pretty consistent the way journalism is taught, but just their skill set, their experiences, their, you know, everything like that. It was just really unique to work with them. I really appreciated that,” said Alumnus 2.

“And I liked the fact that I was in a region that I had never been in, I was in a city in a state that I had never been in, and I was working with people that I had never worked with before. And I really liked the relationship that we built with each other,” said Alumna 3, a justice reporter and a 2018 News21 participant.

However, there are important nuances of which to be aware. Table 6 breaks down the responses by gender. Scores suggest that males in the program felt the program was more attuned to diversity, equity and inclusion than females or those in other categories.

Table 6: Diversity Scale by Gender

STATEMENT	ALL	MALE	FEMALE	OTHER
1. Within the News21 program, diverse perspectives are valued.	4.00	4.36	3.81	3.50
2. Faculty and mentors at News21 value diverse perspectives.	4.09	4.52	3.89	3.25
3. Overall, I felt News21 was an inclusive environment.	4.08	4.46	3.88	3.42

Due to the limited number of respondents falling outside the Male and Female categories, Non-binary/ Non-conforming, Transgender, and Prefer Not to Say were combined for greater statistical power. This Other group contains only 8 respondents, and results should be treated as anecdotal due to the limited number. Statistical testing demonstrated that scores for males were significantly higher than female scores in all items.

Though some participants and partners interviewed indicated that they’d like to see a more intense focus on diversity within the ASU cohort and beyond, News21 administrators have calculated that, since 2010, 25% of News21 participants have been people of color, with more recent classes seeing cohorts of up to 35%. At least one of the alumni suggested the inclusion of more people who can speak languages beyond English, and a newsroom partner recommended News21 increase the diversity of the faculty and applicants, not only in terms of gender or ethnicity but representing more geographic diversity as well. News21 has been working to address all the recommendations mentioned. The team currently has a web designer from India and a Latina digital editor on staff, and has previously employed three assistant editors of color (two Black and one Asian American). News21 partner schools are located in 27 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico, as well as in Canada and Ireland.

## Long-term Impact

Though one stated objective of News21 was to help participants get jobs in the profession, those who stay in the field for many years have more opportunity to make a difference in their newsrooms and in the communities they cover. Some News21 alumni who completed the program a decade or more ago remain immersed in impressive journalism careers.

## Nacho Corbella

Creative Director, Ripple Effect Images

Nacho Corbella is the creative director at Ripple Effect Images, a nonprofit that produces documentaries and photography for NGOs that focus on helping women and girls around the world. Before his News21 experience, Corbella had already worked as a journalist and journalism educator in South America, but his fellowship had such an impact on him that he participated in News21 three times—in 2009 as a student, once again as a coach and once more as an instructor.

“This is by far the best program I’ve ever experienced and been part of. The amount of resources, the amount of trust that was put in the students, it was unbelievable,” Corbella said.

Corbella leveraged his News21 experience into a career that had him working freelance as a visual journalist for *National Geographic* and the *New York Times*. He said one of the highlights was his work with NPR on “Planet Money’s T-Shirt Project,” which took the audience on a journey around the world to make a simple cotton T-shirt—from the farms where the cotton was grown to the factories where the shirts were sewn.



“The T-shirt project, which was the origin of all long-form storytelling on the web, right? It was that and ‘Snow Fall’ from the *New York Times*. Those two were seen and emulated and copied for many years because it was top-notch storytelling and multimedia. So, very proud of that.”

But a journalism career is not always easy.

“I was in Univision during the heavy immigration years and was on the immigration beat. It was taking a toll on me. . . . It was very depressing,” Corbella said.

Now, at Ripple Effect, Corbella is using his visual storytelling skills to tell audiences about women and girls who are taking control of and making better their lives and the lives of others.

“These are empowerment stories that need to be told. Because otherwise, all these positive things that are happening in the world get buried by all the negative things that we’re putting our focus on, so we just try to . . . spark a little bit of a light on these people.”

Corbella says the wonderful coaches he found at News21 helped him grow into the storyteller he is today, but that wasn’t the best part of his experience.

“My wife, Eileen, was also part of the program,” Corbella said with a smile.

Alumna 19, an editor/reporter on the news verification team for the Associated Press and a 2010 News21 participant, has accomplished a great deal since she completed the fellowship.

“I’ve done audio, I now work for the AP, I worked for an alt-weekly, I wrote a book, so there’s been quite a bit of diversity in the kinds of platforms that I’ve been working at, and I think that’s been a really fun part of my career,” she said.

Alumnus 9 is the creative director of a nonprofit. He came to News21 in 2009 as a young journalist and journalism educator from South America. After his News21 experience, he worked primarily as an instructor and a contractor/freelancer.

“For the *New York Times* and *National Geographic*, freelancing and working on short or long projects,” he said. “These days, I am creative director at Ripple Effect Images, which is an NGO where we produce documentaries and photography for other NGOs, whose focus is women and girls around the world.”

The meaningful work these and other News21 alumni produce is often recognized with impressive professional awards and accolades. Within the survey sample, three participants were Pulitzer Prize finalists in back-to-back years, and the group includes a Peabody Award winner, as well as multiple Edward R. Murrow Award winners, Investigative Reporters & Editors Award winners and Robert F. Kennedy Award winners. Respondents have also captured a variety of regional, state and local journalism awards, including Emmy Awards and Public Media Journalist Association Awards. Several respondents have been selected for prestigious fellowships, such as the Annenberg Center for Health Journalism National Fellowship and the Knight-Wallace Fellowship.

One of the reasons why these alumni may be so successful is that they have each other. In the in-depth interviews, many alumni specifically mentioned that connections made during the program helped them later in their careers, as they had a network of people who they could go to for references or professional advice.

“I have this class of students that, you know, they’re now all out in the world doing amazing things, and working at amazing news organizations, and I can reach out to them if I ever want to move somewhere, if I ever need to meet someone, and to have that resource, it’s just, it’s incredible,” said Alumna 13, a 2014 participant who now works as a criminal justice reporter.

Alumnus 20, a freelancer who participated in News21 in 2011, said that he stayed in touch with his News21 colleagues and professors after the program ended.

“They’ve helped me with networking. You know, I’ve had some ideas over the years for not just the nonprofit that I was working on at San Diego but other business ideas of maybe I would leave and start this and they were always there just to give feedback,” he said.

Some even found their significant others during the program.

“Not only did I find my husband at News21, the person who performed our ceremony was a News21 and the witness on my marriage papers was a News21. So, we build a really strong bond,” said Alumna 17, a 2011 participant who is now a journalism professor.

News21 maintains a LinkedIn page where participants and alumni can find information about job opportunities, internships and fellowships. Program administrators also work to maintain current contact information for their alumni and track their careers. Many keep in touch through an informal Facebook group that was created by one of the participants. The group grew from just having members from one cohort to now having members from several different years. Alumni use this group to share experiences they had while they were producing their News21 projects, but to also learn more about one another.

“There are all these people doing incredible things, working at incredible news organizations or, you know, in some cases like PR and nonprofit work. And to be able to network with those people or reach out to those people if I needed to, is really invaluable,” said Alumna 13.

It appears that News21 participants are getting jobs and keeping jobs in journalism. Of the 131 respondents completing the News21 questionnaire, just 15 reported never having worked in journalism. Of those, two reported having lost interest in the profession, and one said he had never planned on pursuing a journalism career at all. News21 and its partners are selecting strong candidates for the program and nurturing their talent by enhancing key skills and fostering life-changing relationships for many. Alumni do recommend additional focus on diversity, equity and inclusion for the program’s future.

## Effect on the Journalism Profession

The funders had a series of expectations related to News21's impact on the journalism profession. Perhaps chief among them was the goal that News21 graduates would be able to lead the industry's transition to more impactful and innovative digital journalism. A second major objective for the ASU-led program was also to raise awareness and acceptance of the high-quality work of which journalism students and schools are capable. Survey data, in-depth interviews with newsroom partners and academic research provide insights into the extent to which the program has been successful.

### Quality Journalism Provider

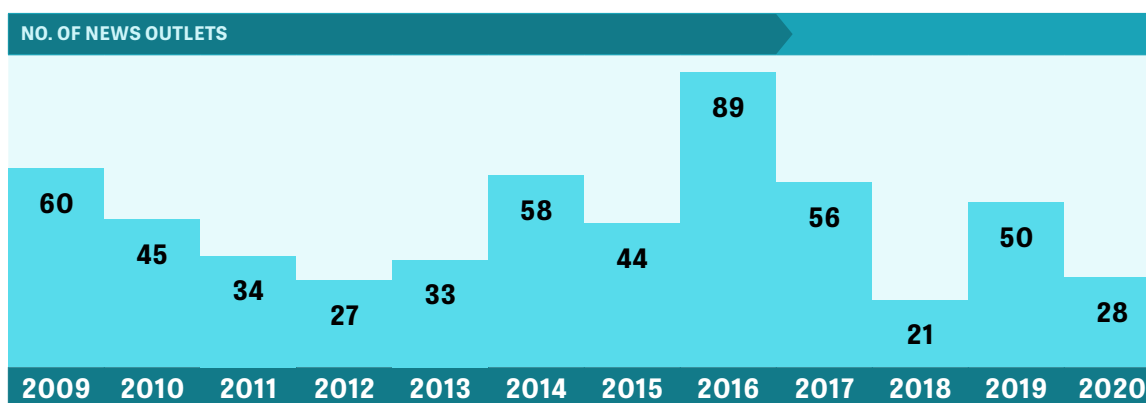
Dozens of highly regarded news providers have worked regularly with News21 over the years. In 2016, ASU reported that a record 89 newsrooms picked up some of the content from the "Voting Wars" project, an investigation of voting rights and election participation. Several newsrooms, including at the *Washington Post* and *USA Today*, have partnered with the program for five or more years. (See Figure 7 for the number of news outlets picking up News21 content over the years.)

"We have found that there's a really high level of rigor and development, and we are able to use the journalism produced by these students in our publication, both in print and on the digital side. I've been really impressed with the quality of the work they've done," said Ann Gerhart, senior editor for visual enterprise at the *Washington Post*.

A relatively new newsroom partner for News21 is Gray Television, which picked up content in 2017 and 2018. Lee Zurik leads Gray's national investigative team and praises what the student participants can do.

"It's high-quality work. It's really good. It's important topics and they're usually pretty timely, too," Zurik said. In fact, he said that the work is so well done that they have used the content online, on-air and on the company's streaming app.

Figure 7: Publication Outlets for News21 Content



Since 2016, the number of publication outlets has decreased. ASU's Kristin Gilger said they try to identify outlets based on the topic and the region, targeting, for example, regional news outlets in areas where they've done reporting, or an outlet like Kaiser Health News if the topic is relevant.

"I will say it's gotten harder to get news organizations to pay attention. Many are just terribly understaffed and so it often takes a personal connection," Gilger said, who also indicated some News21 topics capture more interest from news outlets than others.

**Ann Gerhart**  
Senior Editor for Visual Enterprise, the Washington Post

Ann Gerhart is senior editor for visual enterprise at the *Washington Post*, a job that has her focused on promoting journalism that incorporates visual storytelling techniques. In her time as an editor, Gerhart has helped to get seven News21 projects published on *Post* platforms. She said the program is unique.

“This is single-minded focus on one particular body of work. In essence, this is boot camp for a beat, and how to structure a beat and the kind of sourcing you need to develop to take on a beat,” Gerhart said. “To be able to discern how something is working is to first understand how it’s supposed to work, which is the part of learning a beat that doesn’t necessarily show itself in your work, but it is foundational.”

Gerhart said that programs like News21 are becoming more necessary to the industry.

“With the complete decline of not just third- and fourth-tier papers, but second-tier papers, which traditionally were the finest training ground for large organizations like the *Post*, it’s very hard to find places where journalists are getting that kind of on-the-job training,” Gerhart said. “That’s been a real challenge for recruiting top-quality journalism talent, and I think the kind of work these students are getting in this program is a finishing school.”

Journalism schools should take note of News21’s approach, said Gerhart, but should also reach out to newsrooms to showcase their own top talent.

“Tell us you have this crackerjack student who has just an amazing gift for the telling detail in videography, or just a real zeal for going out and going through documents and has already been making use of FOIA. Reach out to us because our visibility of that is really narrow; we just get applications.”

Those personal connections are sometimes leveraged thanks to the faculty who work on News21, including Leonard Downie Jr., former executive editor of the *Washington Post*, and Bill Marimow, who worked briefly with News21 before returning to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* as editor. The *Inquirer* ran News21 stories from six different projects starting in 2012 through 2018.

“I was impressed by the depth and the timeliness and the professional reporting and writing,” Marimow said. “Throughout the time that we published the News21 stories, I think David Solomon was the copy desk chief, and he always came back and said, ‘Wow, these things are great. These are excellent.’”

In fact, the level of work produced by some News21 fellows is of such caliber that both the *Post* and the *Inquirer* have hired graduates, in part, because of their News21 experience.

“It’d be great if there were 12 more programs like this, but this has just been really fantastic,” Gerhart said. “To be honest, I have seen a higher level of talent and editing polish [in News21 fellows] than a lot of people who present their clips from Columbia. When we see somebody who has on their resume that they have been part of this program, we’re always taking a look.”

One mark of quality journalism is its performance in journalism competitions. News21 projects have won some of the most prestigious awards available from the organizations Investigative Reporters & Editors, Editor and Publisher, Broadcast Education Association, Online News Association and the Society of Professional Journalists, as well as Edward R. Murrow and Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards.

## Measuring Impact

Does the quality of News21 content and its broad distribution ensure that it has widespread impact? That question is difficult to answer. With the business models that support journalism organizations in flux, there has been renewed effort to find methods for measuring the impact of journalism, and to define what is meant by “impact” (Stray 2012; Lewis and Niles 2013; Tofel 2013).



It is particularly difficult to find clear evidence of causal effects. Tofel writes that impact is different from reach, circulation or readership. In some cases, a small but powerful readership might be enough to produce direct impact. In other cases, the impact of news media is cumulative, requiring the influence of mass circulation or viewership over time. Tofel concluded that there was “no single algorithm that can be devised, no magic formula to load into a spreadsheet or deploy in an app” to measure impact (Tofel 2013, 21).

Some have proposed metrics based on the knowledge level of the target audience, or a change in audience belief because of the consumption of news media (Meyer 2009). Lewis and Niles, in a survey of the literature on how to define impact, observe that there are few definitive conclusions about how best to measure impact, but that most proposed models incorporate some combination of two “strata”: reach, meaning the number of individuals who encounter news content, and engagement, meaning an exchange of information between news source and audience (Lewis and Niles 2013).

The newsroom partners we interviewed shared similar views. Former *Philadelphia Inquirer* editor Bill Marimow pointed to two types of metrics—one for the digital era and one, he said, “for all time.”

“I’ll start with the digital era. Obviously, a story becomes a success if it has high readership. And not only high readership, but high reading time.”

As a self-described traditionalist, however, Marimow said other metrics continue to remain more important.

“Number one is where the story lands. Is it going to be on the front page? Is it going to be on the homepage? Secondly, does it address a matter of important public interest? And does it lead to action?,” Marimow said. “So, I believe that two of those measures, number of hits, and time reading, combined with where it’s played on the website, and in the newspaper and the results are my gauges of whether something’s a success.”

Ann Gerhart of the *Washington Post* described some of the ways that her organization measures impact, including determining how many people are reading their content and how much of the story they consume. She also said that they look at the “accountability aspect” of the journalism they produce.

“Our investigations or deeper dives that take a look at a particular policy problem and find real people who illustrate that and do the tough reporting to try to get some answers, certainly, if there is movement or change from that, that is one of the ways we measure impact—if a program is then revised, or we have brought to light something that merits someone being removed [from a position],” Gerhart said.

Lee Zurik of Gray Television’s “Investigate TV” agrees that results like those that Gerhart describes are the holy grail of journalism, although he says other forms of impact are much harder to define and measure but may be equally important.

“Sometimes impact is just getting something that people didn’t know about noticed and understood a little more and then maybe your impact is a little more subtle,” Zurik said. “I may change some people’s minds or have them look at a topic differently than they did before.”

Measuring consistently the impact of News21 journalism over the past ten years is also difficult. The newsroom partners interviewed said their organizations are not specifically tracking the impact of the News21 content they publish; however, annual reports do shed some light on the issue.

- In 2010, “Breakdown: Traveling Dangerously in America” determined that America’s transportation safety apparatus is badly broken. The associated stories generated nearly 5.2 million page views in just 18 days—more traffic for News21 content than had been generated in all previous years combined. Nearly 2,500 reader comments were posted on the stories.
- In 2012, “Who Can Vote?” involved gathering, organizing and analyzing all reported cases of election fraud in the U.S. since 2000. The content was published by more than 25 news

organizations, including nbcnews.com, the *Washington Post* and the Center for Public Integrity. Within six weeks, the stories had generated 7 million page views and approximately 18,000 comments. That same project was cited in a GAO report as being one of only five out of more than 300 studies to use a systematic methodology to identify instances of in-person voter fraud.

- Beginning in 2013, trackable page views appeared to be no longer reliable: 2013: 660,928; 2014: 628,656; 2015: 688,995. As of 2016, annual reports indicated that this figure had become noncomparable as news outlets varied in their consistency of providing the data. As a result, ASU stopped reporting updates to this metric.

As noted earlier, audience metrics are just one measure of impact that journalists value.

“We also measure impact as shining a light on a marginalized, disenfranchised, often ignored community or group of people who very rarely get attention and sometimes struggle to have their voices heard, who struggle for representation,” Gerhart said.

A review of the topics covered by News21 over the past decade (see Appendix A) would suggest that reporting on overlooked topics and communities is a hallmark of the program.

Tofel makes the key observation that both reach and engagement will operate differently in different contexts. For example, an explanatory piece of journalism might have the impact of a more informed population, even if there is no direct societal change as a result. Investigative journalism, on the other hand, might engage only a small number of individuals, but if they are in a position of power to correct identified problems, then the impact may be great (Tofel 2013).

Studying the impact of data journalism, Green-Barber (2021) proposes a framework that includes four types of impact: On individuals, on networks, on institutions and on public discourse. News21 program administrators may want to consider developing a new strategy for measuring impact going forward. For example, it may be wise to set impact goals each year, based on the reporting topic. This approach would allow those involved to consider what impact might be feasible, given the parameters of the project, and would allow them to determine the metrics to track on the front end, making it possible to get a commitment from publishing partners to provide those data where applicable.

Academic research and interviews with News21’s publishing partners suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to assessing impact is unlikely to result in truly meaningful information about the value of the program and may contribute to some of the assessment challenges found in the documentation provided in annual reports.

## Fostering Innovation

One goal of the News21 project has been to promote innovation in newsrooms where fellows go to work after the program ends. Of respondents who were either currently working or had previously worked in journalism, 84% reported that News21 made them more innovative in their approach to journalism.

Those who indicated that News21 had made them more innovative were also asked if they were able to apply that innovation in their current positions. Seventy-five percent of respondents answered “Yes.”

In analyzing the open-ended responses for those who answered yes, three categories of innovation emerged. First and most common was the innovative application of data journalism and visualization skills gained from News21. The next most common innovation-related response centered on the ability to take a broader view on issues they were reporting or to consider more diverse perspectives and stakeholders. Finally, the use of multimedia skills developed in News21 appeared somewhat frequently as an area where they were able to be innovative.



Gordon Witkin, former executive editor for the Center for Public Integrity, said that News21 has become the “gold standard” for industry-academia partnerships, but he did not see innovative work from News21 having a significant impact on professional newsrooms.

“In the early days, I said, ‘Oh, this is interesting. They’re doing a lot of visuals; I wish we could do more of that.’ But I don’t think it’s realistic to expect mainstream daily, hourly or by-the-minute news organizations to feel like they’re sitting around, scratching their chin going, ‘Well, let’s be more like News21,’” Witkin said.

Gerhart also spoke of the technical challenges involved in hosting content created outside of an organization.

“I have really very much admired the work done by graphics and designers and developers for News21. But we can’t so easily convert that into our own bespoke content management system. It needs to be in a format that is lower-end and can kind of sail onto a site without a great deal of conversion work,” Gerhart said.

News21’s Gilger said that the program has focused on innovation in the form of reporting and presentation. The program has won the top award in the Online News Association (ONA) student category four times since 2014 and has been a finalist in two other years. Over the years, judges for the competition have noted innovations including stop-motion video, animation, audience engagement techniques, interactive maps and graphics, data visualizations, podcasts, documentaries and news games. The 2020 “Kids Imprisoned” project, for example, which was executed during the pandemic, was recognized for its innovation in the ONA competition and the Best of the West Contest, beating out the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Seattle Times* in the online presentation category.

News21’s executive editor Jacque Petchel says continual innovation is a challenge.

“It’s really hard, even as much as I read so much news and look at so many projects, to sort of ask myself, ‘Okay, what is anybody else doing that’s really different?’” Petchel said. She also noted one other significant obstacle. “If I think, ‘Oh, let’s try this,’ I have to make sure that someone that’s not me can execute it, meaning a student, because it’s their work.”

As you might expect, News21 alumni find themselves in a variety of situations affecting their ability to innovate. Survey respondents currently working in journalism were asked: “How innovative overall do you believe your current newsroom is?” (See Table 8.) Just 19% considered the innovation in their newsrooms to be “very limited” and 0% reported no innovation at all.

Table 8: Perceived Innovativeness of Current Newsroom

ANSWER	PERCENTAGE	N
Not innovative at all	0%	0
Very limited innovation	19%	16
I feel it’s about average	26%	22
Somewhat innovative	34%	29
Very innovative	20%	17
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>84</b>

Assessment of News21’s innovation efforts and its subsequent impact on newsrooms is challenging for a variety of reasons. Innovation can mean a new method or idea, but journalists and others have often come to equate innovation with new technologies—virtual reality, 3-D modeling or photogrammetry, for example. These more advanced forms of technological innovation require expanded skill sets. A more concrete definition of what successful innovation might look like for News21 would be helpful as the

program tries to achieve that goal. Ultimately, it may require an expansion or rethinking of the News21 participant and instructor mix.

Overall, survey respondents agreed that News21 made them more innovative as journalists, and most felt they had been able to apply this innovation in their current roles. Data journalism, a greater perspective on how diversity needs to be accounted for in storytelling, and multimedia skills were the most common areas of innovation noted by respondents. For those who felt they were unable to innovate, the most common reason was the lack of resources in their respective newsrooms.

## Impact on Curriculum

One News21 objective was to prompt participating universities to innovate within their own curricula. Survey data and in-depth interviews with participating school administrators and News21 alumni shed some light on how successful the program has been in achieving this objective.

Survey respondents were asked if their participation with News21 had an effect on the curriculum of the journalism programs from which they came (see Table 9). The vast majority of respondents (89%) either answered “Unsure” or “No.”

Table 9: News21 Impact on Alma Mater’s Curriculum

ANSWER	PERCENTAGE	N
Unsure	50%	66
No	39%	51
Yes	11%	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>84</b>

Of note is that 5 of the 14 respondents who answered “Yes” were also students at ASU at the time of their participation in News21. In an open-ended follow-up question asking how the curriculum was affected, one respondent stated: “I . . . wish more of my education at ASU looked like News21. I think that JMC 301 did a good job of preparing us for News21 and gave us the necessary skills from a writing standpoint, but also that News21 did a better job of teaching participants basic photo/video skills than anything at Cronkite. . . . Cronkite should make students do multimedia as much as News21 did.” Several other respondents who said News21 did affect curriculum are journalism educators and two of those are currently teaching at ASU.

In-depth interviews with alumni who have taught journalism revealed that they are trying to implement what they learned during News21 in their own classrooms. Alumnus 9, who was a News21 participant in 2009 and now works as a creative director, said that he participated in the program three times—first as a student, the second time as a coach and then as an instructor. He spent nine years as an educator, and said he implemented the rigor and push for excellence he experienced during the program.

“And then I had a lot of project-based classes replicating the same idea with absolutely no budget,” said Alumnus 9.

Alumna 17 recently got hired as a journalism professor. She said that she would love to see some principles of News21 incorporated into video tutorials and lesson plans that other schools can use to help replicate the program.

## Jacqueline Jones

Dean of the School of Global Journalism and Communication, Morgan State University

Jacqueline “Jackie” Jones is dean of the School of Global Journalism and Communication at Morgan State University and has served in this role since July 2021. Jones is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who worked in newsrooms such as the *Philadelphia Daily News* and the *Washington Post*. She has been at Morgan State University since 2012 and has seen real value in getting students involved in News21.



“I think that what we got out of it is strengthening of our students as reporters and writers, building their confidence, and also helping to build a reputation for us because we’re a school that is a player in the game,” Jones said.

Jones said she first learned about the News21 program during a visit to the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at ASU a few years ago. She thought the program was fascinating, but out of reach for Morgan State University because of the cost.

To help with the cost, News21 leaders offered a discount for Morgan State students who get accepted to the program. As a result, two students have participated in News21 in the past three years.

“And that is huge in terms of building our reputation and what we want to do with the program and where we want our students to go,” Jones said.

In-depth interviews with school administrators also revealed that measuring the impact of News21 on the curricula of participating schools is difficult. Sheehan and dean of the University of Missouri School of Journalism David Kurpius said that their programs have been using News21 techniques for a long time, and that News21 did not necessarily introduce them to the concepts as much as it reinforced the idea that this approach to teaching is valuable.

“It certainly is affirmed. It’s not that we learned all this from News21, but it is that we believe in the spirit and the mission and want to see programs like this succeed,” Sheehan said.

Kurpius said that in order to have a bigger impact on curriculum, school administrators should be directly involved to see exactly what happens during the program, so that they can bring these ideas back to their campuses.

On the other hand, Colin Donahue, director of Student Engagement and Special Projects and instructor of journalism at the School of Communication at Elon University, said that, while a direct impact on the curriculum is not there, he has seen students who participated in News21 return to campus and implement what they learned.

“So, our philosophy has been for the most part to send rising seniors out there, so that they have to come back and do their senior year on campus and bring that knowledge to the student paper, to their classes, to whatever they’re working on,” Donahue said. “And so, there’s definitely been an impact there when we’ve been able to do that, because they come back stronger reporters, stronger editors, and a lot more confident in their abilities.”

This approach has the potential for exponential impact.

“We like the idea of them coming back and sharing that knowledge with younger students to strengthen their work, or maybe getting younger students excited about potentially participating in something like News21 down the line,” Donahue said.

Gilger notes that, when News21 started, the initiative was able to push some of the largest journalism schools to rethink their curricula. The focus since 2011 has been on expanding the impact.

“What News21 did was introduce on a national scale the concept that journalism students could do not just quality work and share it with audiences on a regional level, but they could do professional quality work at the national level and reach significant audiences. No one—not even Missouri—was doing that previously. It’s much more common now—I would say, in part at least, thanks to News21’s proof of concept.”

In 2016, for example, the International Reporting Program at the University of British Columbia (UBC) School of Journalism piloted a course, which became the Global Reporting Program. The program brings together graduate students from around the world to work on year-long investigations. Peter Klein, director of the Global Reporting Centre at UBC, has credited News21 as an inspiration for the program’s collaborative teaching model.

Jacqueline Jones, dean of the School of Global Journalism and Communication at Morgan State University, agrees that partner schools could play a role in expanding the impact of News21 on journalism education.

“What I usually do when our students go off and have good experiences, I have them come back and talk to the other students about what that is like. And you know, how they got ready, what they wish they had done to prepare a little more or what they think can be done and what we should be doing to help push students along. And so, I think that emboldens them to really feel like they’re invested in the education and the outcomes,” said Jones.

Jones and Donahue explained that these students often become leaders at their student-run media centers and take charge in classrooms when working on bigger projects.

“But you know, if I had a student in News21, and then they come back, and then they take that culminating journalism course with me, and I put them in groups or partnerships, that I know at least that one group with that student, that student should be able to help direct the rest of that group and help them produce something that’s going to be complete,” said Donahue.

Overall, journalism program administrators did not see News21 as having a direct impact on their own curricula, but they valued what the initiative could offer those students who were able to participate in the program, especially when students come back to their universities and share what they’ve learned. News21 alumni who have taught journalism indicated that they are trying to implement what they’ve learned during News21 in their own classrooms.

## The Cost Concern

After more than one program administrator expressed concerns about the cost of sending students to News21, an additional component of this review involved collecting information about the funding model.

According to ASU representatives, the current cost per fellow is approximately \$22,193. This amount reflects summer 2021 budgeted expenses and the total number of fellows enrolled. News21’s annual budget is approximately \$750,000. The Knight Foundation’s contribution is \$100,000 a year, plus interest income.

The Knight funds are used to support about half of the executive editor’s salary and benefits and to pay for other faculty and staff who are assigned to the summer program (digital editor, assistant editor and visual editor).

Since 2015, News21 has used the interest on the Knight contribution primarily to support scholarships for students from schools such as Morgan State and the University of North Texas, with a focus on increasing diversity.

Additional support for the program comes from the ASU president's office and a variety of foundations, news organizations and philanthropists that include the Inasmuch Foundation, Hearst Foundations, Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, International Ireland Funds, the *Arizona Republic*, the *Dallas Morning News* and others. ASU developed relationships with these funders to help offset the costs of the program and has been successful in garnering nearly \$2 million to provide stipends and travel for student fellows.

While the school administrators interviewed appreciated the opportunities for their students to participate in the News21 program, they all agree that the program is too expensive. Most partner schools pay \$11,500 for each student who participates. Kurpius said that, at the University of Missouri, they have five professional news outlets, and the students already get what they need to be competitive in the market once they graduate.

“When I looked at the budget, I was saying, the experience that they’re getting there, they get here in our classes every day. I mean, it just didn’t make sense to me. And so, I didn’t see value added,” Kurpius said.

Sheehan said that he wished the University of Florida could send more than just one student, but the cost is too steep.

“There are a lot of opportunities for fundraising, but our donors traditionally want to see the benefit of their gifts spread out a little bit more, so that that large chunk kind of limits,” he said.

While bigger journalism programs struggle to cover the expenses, Jones said that if they did not get a steep discount, they could not afford to send a student from Morgan State.

“So, we don’t have wealthy alums to tap for money. We don’t have a history of fundraising. We are a state institution. Maryland was going through a tight economy, so it wasn’t being super generous with the state institutions. So, the university didn’t have a lot of money to throw our way,” said Jones.

However, the administrators interviewed also agreed that News21 was a positive experience for their students. Jones said that she appreciated students learning how to collaborate and getting the chance to work on projects with students who are geographically and racially diverse to build networks and exchange experiences.

“And the opportunity for students to work with peers from different institutions is a great opportunity for them in terms of expanding the definition of diversity, equity and inclusion. And so that there’s, you know, sort of the geographic and the cultural differences, and not just race and gender,” said Jones.

Administrators concurred that the opportunity for students to work with top professionals who provide strong direction and editing helps them grow their skills at a much higher level. They think that the end product is, in general, of high quality and that they appreciate that top national journalism organizations recognize and publish News21 work.

“I see the value of the students who participated, I think they come back with excellent experiences that they tend to do very well, although I recognize that schools are picking the cream of the crop,” said Kurpius.

For some schools, having students participate in News21 is perceived to add cache to their programs.

“And so, we thought this was a good way, if we had students who could get into this program, get the experience, make their mark, and learn kind of in a boot camp way, what journalism really is, that that would be perfect for the students and good for us and for the school’s reputation overall,” said Jones.

These journalism schools perceive News21 as a quality program that benefits the participants. However, News21’s impact on journalism education as a whole appears to be limited and the price tag for individual students is likely preventing some schools from participating at the levels they’d like to and may be preventing some from participating at all.



## Program Evolution and Future

Our research suggests that News21 has been instrumental in nurturing the careers of a significant number of practicing journalists, helping them to be more innovative and better at teamwork, data-driven journalism and interviewing, as well as more aware of the need for diverse perspectives in media.

The program's newsroom partners we interviewed confirmed the quality of the journalism News21 produces, and the plentiful awards garnered by the projects affirm this view. Journalism program administrators value what News21 can offer students who participate, and value their association with this elite program.

However, the program has room to be reinvigorated, to build on a solid foundation in order to more fully achieve the original or newly defined objectives of its funders.

### Jacquee Petchel Executive Editor, News21

Jacquee Petchel is the executive editor of News21. An award-winning investigative reporter, editor and producer, Petchel has served many roles in the industry, most recently as senior editor for investigations and enterprise at the *Houston Chronicle*. She was also part of two Pulitzer Prize-winning teams at the *Miami Herald* and worked on investigative teams for local television stations in Minneapolis and Miami.

Petchel has been a part of News21 at ASU since 2013 and has developed a deep commitment to the students who participate in the program.

"I watch them change dramatically over the summer, and I stay in touch almost all of their lives; long after they're gone," Petchel said. "There's one guy, he's at the *Washington Post* for God's sake, a videographer. He calls me all the time. He's like, 'Okay, okay, I got to ask you a question. I just don't know what to do about this.' It's one of my favorite things when I hear from them."

Petchel sees herself as serving not just ASU, but also News21's partners.

"If universities are putting their faith in us indirectly, or directly in me, I feel like I have a big responsibility to the school as much as I do the program that [the students] do excellent work that helps them get jobs," she said.

She recognizes the larger goals of the News21 initiative. "I see my critical role as shaping young journalists, many who come from completely different programs and backgrounds."

Petchel is humble about the part she plays in the success of the program, but she's very proud of what the students accomplish every year.

"We've won so many awards in News21. You know, my mother told me you should never brag about the good things you do, or you take away the good that you've done, but I'm really only bragging on News21."



The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York launched News21 in 2005 with five universities: the University of California at Berkeley, Columbia University, Harvard University, Northwestern University and the University of Southern California. Three years later, seven other schools were added: Arizona State University, University of Maryland, University of Missouri, University of Nebraska, University of North Carolina, University of Texas and Syracuse University. ASU began coordinating the project that year with a goal of bringing together top students from across the country to report and produce in-depth, multimedia projects for publication in professional media outlets.

In 2011, Carnegie and Knight selected ASU to operate News21 for 10 years on the condition that they open the program up to all journalism schools.

News21's executive editor Jacquee Petchel has led the program since 2013, and she has worked hard to keep the program fresh.

"Every year I try to find something different," Petchel said. "I just finished my ninth project and I'm always looking for ways to engage audiences and students, asking what we can do that's new this time."

For example, Petchel says the "Hate in America" project included many of the standard reporting techniques, including comprehensive data acquisition and a survey of previous reporting.

"Then I turned to a colleague and said, 'We should send a crew on a road trip across the U.S. to talk to regular people in communities where people are often targeted.' We drove 7,000 miles across 20 states. We talked to farmers, road workers, and spent time in small towns that no one ever visits. We avoided the predictable sources to find those you might not normally encounter," Petchel said.

Petchel's emphasis on solid reporting that leads to unique ways of telling important stories has not changed in her years of overseeing the program, and that focus has likely led to graduates' continued success in creating high-quality work and finding jobs.

What has changed is that program administrators have been able to raise funds to increase the scholarship pool for News21 fellows at ASU, and they have included approximately 40 additional partner schools who send students to participate in the program. They have also become more intentional in expanding the list of schools to add diversity to the fellows' cohort.

Other findings reveal new challenges. For example, in the early days of News21, the focus on technology-driven innovation had many schools and some news organizations looking to the program as a leader in developing new forms of storytelling. There appears to be less of that now, perhaps because many newsrooms and journalism programs have caught up to News21's capabilities.

It's also become more difficult for News21 projects to find as many publication partners as they have previously. For the last three years, the number of publications picking up News21 content has been at the lowest levels in the program's history. As many U.S. news organizations struggle to manage with fewer resources, finding receptive publications has become more challenging.

News21 has been the "gold standard," as one interview subject said, and there is an opportunity for the program to be refreshed in some areas while it maintains its core strengths.

## Conclusion: What Next?

As ASU and those funding News21 consider how the program might evolve going forward, the researchers make these recommendations:

- For the News21 initiative to have more of an impact on the whole of journalism education, the effort should be modified. Those interviewed suggest involving administrators from partner schools more thoroughly, inviting faculty from partner schools to serve as teaching assistants, recommending participants have at least a year remaining on their home campuses after the News21 program ends, or requiring some sort of presentation or other work product from a participant to help ensure that what they've learned in News21 is disseminated more broadly at their home institutions.
- There should be renewed focus on finding new types of partners to publish News21 content and to potentially involve interested partners earlier in the process.

- Administrators and some alumni suggested incorporating a regional component of the project in which partner schools could work on the same project as the primary News21 cohort and work to get that content published in regional news outlets. Zurik, for example, expressed interest in getting involved earlier in the News21 planning process to ensure that they could better schedule and enhance the content across their 100+ newsrooms.
- Alumni seem to especially value personal connections fostered by News21 and several suggested that the program create a more formalized network that would allow graduates to stay connected to ASU and one another throughout their lives.
- Alumni and partners suggested the program build on existing diversity, equity and inclusion efforts to identify and mitigate any barriers to selection or participation. One approach might involve developing closer relationships with HBCUs and other schools with large enrollments of underserved populations.

In addition, the review raises some key questions for ASU and the Knight Foundation:

- Which of the program's objectives must change for the future and which should remain? For continuing or revised goals, how will benchmark data sources be located and made explicit with reporting requirements clearly outlined?
- How frequently should all News21 program leaders and funders review the existing objectives of the program to be sure that they never lose sight of the goals?
- How will diversity, equity and inclusion efforts be further embraced in the program? What goals should be set?
- How do the grantee and the funder define innovation going forward? Will a newly defined innovation goal require a reallocation of resources or additional resources? Are there tradeoffs to consider in balancing the space for innovation with expectations around journalistic excellence?
- What goals, if any, does the program have with respect to students' long-term careers in journalism, and how might that be better measured in the future?

There is room for News21 to improve and grow, but it will build on a solid foundation. Consider this data point: Survey respondents were asked to what degree they agreed with the statement, "I would still have participated in my News21 experience." The score for this question averaged 4.66 (*SD* = .82), giving it the strongest lean toward "Strongly Agree" out of any attitudinal item on the survey.

ASU's News21 is a program of importance to participants, helpful for the industry and respected by its peer institutions. It has the opportunity to do even more in the future.

# Appendix A

	PROJECT	DESCRIPTION
2020	<b>Kids Imprisoned</b>	A key finding of this eight-month investigation is that justice is handed down disproportionately, depending on where juveniles live, their race, which police officer arrests them or which judge, prosecutor or probation officer happens to be involved in the case. Depending on where a young person lives, the same crime can result in something as mild as rehab and mentoring, or as severe as incarceration behind barbed wire in an environment of rioting and sexual abuse. (Because of COVID-19, the News21 fellows from 16 universities reported virtually from their hometowns or home campuses across the country, using innovative ways to produce their multimedia stories.)
2019	<b>State of Emergency</b>	This major investigation into natural disasters explored how local and federal agencies respond to communities devastated by disasters. They also interviewed victims, survivors, first responders and reports from affected communities. Reporters have reviewed thousands of pages of government documents and produced multimedia stories, original data sets and documentary videos.
2018	<b>Hate in America</b>	As an investigation examining intolerance, racism and hate crimes, this group of student journalists traveled more than 7,000 miles and interviewed nearly 300 people. They also produced a documentary and a five-episode podcast following the lifecycle of hate.
2017	<b>Troubled Water</b>	An investigation into accessibility to clean water throughout the United States, this project examines water issues from the perspectives of residents, environmental officials and experts. Stories come from Texas, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Michigan, Maine, Montana and New Jersey. Issues with the water include arsenic, lead, iron, coal ash and fertilizer contamination. Sources of pollution include an Air Force base, mines and old lead pipes.
2016	<b>Voting Wars</b>	This project is an investigation of voting rights and election participation. The student journalists conducted hundreds of interviews, reviewed thousands of pages of state statutes and other records and built databases and data visualizations documenting the issues surrounding voter rights and participation.
2015	<b>America's Weed Rush</b>	This investigation of marijuana legislation in America led the fellows to examine issues surrounding marijuana legalization nationwide. From Nevada to Maine, reporters interviewed longtime politicians, parents, patients, mothers and advocacy groups on all sides of the debate. They uncovered wide disparities in the enforcement of state marijuana laws and examined the lack of federal research for potential medical marijuana benefits.

2014	<b>Gun Wars</b>	This project examined the political and cultural divide between those who say the right to own and carry guns is guaranteed by the Second Amendment and those who believe firearms should be more regulated. As a result, this project showcases the voices of longtime politicians, shooting victims, militia members, rural sheriffs, hunting enthusiasts, inner-city mothers and advocacy groups on all sides of the debate.
2013	<b>Back Home: Enduring Battles Facing Post 9/11 Veterans</b>	Since American troops first deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, more than 2.6 million veterans have returned home to a country largely unprepared to meet their needs. Many returned from war with what will be lifelong illnesses and disabilities and struggled to get the help they were promised in the form of disability payments, jobs, health care and treatment for such afflictions as post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, physical disabilities and military sexual trauma.
2012	<b>Who Can Vote?</b>	News21 was able to gather, organize and analyze all reported cases of election fraud in the U.S. since 2000, building the most comprehensive database of its kind. The finished project launched just before the 2012 political conventions, consisting of more than 20 in-depth reports and rich multimedia content.
2011	<b>How Safe Is Your Food?</b>	A national investigation into food safety details the widespread incidence and many causes of foodborne illness in the U.S. and shows how a combination of industry practices and gaps in government oversight leaves consumers vulnerable.
2010	<b>Breakdown: Traveling Dangerously in America</b>	News21 student journalists determined that America's transportation safety apparatus is badly broken. Recommendations to improve safety for the traveling public are often ignored and cases are closed without resolution. This investigation with the Center for Public Integrity shows clearly what's wrong with the system.

# Appendix B

Feedback from alumni was garnered through interviews and a survey. Interview subjects and survey respondents are described below.

## INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

A total of 21 News21 alumni representing the years 2009–20 were interviewed about their experiences with the program. Among the 11 men and 10 women, there were 6 BIPOC interview subjects. Fourteen of the interviewees work in journalism as reporters, social media editors, TV anchors or freelancers, while the other 7 work in communication-related fields such as corporate communications or as journalism professors.

## SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Survey Response Rate: 51% (131 completed surveys out of a final list of 257 emails)

Demographics:

- Average age of sample: 30
- Average years worked in journalism: 6
- Average year of program: 2015
- Mean year of program: 2015

## GROUPING BY YEAR

YEAR	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
2009	2%	3
2010	8%	10
2011	15%	20
2012	5%	6
2013	5%	7
2014	11%	15
2015	8%	10
2016	10%	13
2017	7%	9
2018	8%	11
2019	12%	16
2020	8%	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>131</b>

HISPANIC	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
No	89%	116
Yes	11%	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>131</b>

ETHNICITY	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
White	82%	108
Other	8%	11
Black or African American	7%	9
Asian	2%	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>131</b>

GENDER	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Female	56%	73
Male	38%	50
Prefer not to say	4%	5
Non-binary / non-conforming	2%	2
Transgender	1%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>131</b>

UNIVERSITY	PERCENT	N
Arizona State University	44%	57
University of Maryland	5%	6
University of British Columbia	4%	5
University of Florida	4%	5
University of Texas at Austin	4%	5
Columbia University	3%	4
Kent State University	3%	4
University of Oklahoma	3%	4
Florida International University	3%	4
University of North Carolina	3%	4
Northwestern University	2%	3
University of California at Berkeley	2%	3
University of Tennessee - Knoxville	2%	3
University of Missouri	2%	3
University of Nebraska	2%	3
University of Illinois Chicago	2%	2
Texas Christian University	2%	2
Syracuse University	2%	2
Harvard Kennedy School	2%	2
University of Southern California	1%	1
University of Oregon	1%	1
Hofstra University	1%	1
Louisiana State University	1%	1
DePauw University	1%	1
Oklahoma State University	1%	1
Elon University	1%	1
Morgan State University	1%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>129</b>

(Two respondents chose not to answer.) Out of all respondents, 84 (64%) reported currently working in journalism. Another 32 (24%) had worked in journalism at some time since participating in News21, and 15 (11%) reported never having worked in journalism.

## References

Green-Barber, L. (2021). 50. "Beyond Clicks and Shares: How and Why to Measure the Impact of Data Journalism Projects." *Towards a Critical Data Practice*, 370.

Lewis, Charles, and Hillary Niles. (2013). "Measuring Impact: The Art, Science and Mystery of Nonprofit News." Investigative Reporting Workshop.

Meyer, P. (2009). *The Vanishing Newspaper: Saving Journalism in the Information Age*. University of Missouri Press.

Stray, Jonathan. (2012). "Metrics, Metrics Everywhere: How Do We Measure the Impact of Journalism?" Nieman Lab, August 17. <https://www.niemanlab.org/2012/08/metrics-metrics-everywhere-how-do-we-measure-the-impact-of-journalism/>.

Tofel, Richard J. (2013). "Non-Profit Journalism: Issues around Impact." A White Paper from ProPublica.





