

American University's Center for Social Media Launches Public Media ThinkTank

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WASHINGTON, DC (May 11, 2005) – The Center for Social Media, a project of American University's School of Communication, has received a \$1 million dollar, two-year grant from the Ford Foundation, to launch the Public Media ThinkTank. The ThinkTank will conduct and publish research on new directions in public media, convene meetings of leaders throughout the field to think through these directions, host public events and screenings to showcase the best in public media, and encourage and create demonstration experiments in new public media expression. The ThinkTank's activities will begin in September.

The Public Media ThinkTank is one of 13 grantees in the Ford Foundation's new initiative, *Global Perspectives in a Digital Age: Transforming Public Service Media*. The initiative, announced May 10, will distribute \$50 million over five years to a wide range of public media organizations, ranging from PBS and NPR to California New Media, which works with ethnic and youth media. The initial \$1 million grant to the Center for Social Media may be extended after the first two years for the duration of the five-year project.

“Public media’ is a big, exciting concept, and it’s overdue for attention. Public media aren’t just a set of established institutions, but represent a whole range of new media organizations, producers and users,” said Center director Pat Aufderheide. Aufderheide, a professor in the School of Communication, is a noted critic and historian of documentary and public media. “We see public media as a special zone on the media landscape—one poorly understood today but critical to civil society and democratic culture.” Public media include public service broadcasting, satellite and cable public service media, innovative projects such as StoryCorps, and Internet-based enterprises such as OneWorld.net.

In addition to the Center for Social Media, another one of the 13 grantees in the Ford Foundation initiative is based at American University –OneWorld United States, the US Center of OneWorld.net, a global online network of over 1600 non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

“Public media today face new structural, political, and technological challenges and opportunities,” said Noëlle McAfee, the Center’s incoming deputy director. McAfee will coordinate the Public Media ThinkTank. “Now that old rationales no longer fit, it is crucial to understand and rethink the public mission of public media.”

The Center for Social Media was established in 2001, with the arrival of Dean Larry Kirkman to the School of Communication. Kirkman also launched OneWorld U.S. and serves as chairman of the One World International Foundation.

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“The ThinkTank will be the intellectual hub of this ambitious effort to create a vigorous and inclusive public culture in the emerging digital environment. The Center for Social Media will stimulate conversations across generations, institutions, and media platforms,” Kirkman said. “We need to anticipate and help shape the evolving life forms on the public media horizon.”

American University’s School of Communication is a laboratory for professional education, communication research and innovative production across the fields of journalism, film and media arts, and public communication.

For more information about AU’s Center for Social Media, visit <http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/>. For media assistance, contact Maralee Csellar, AU Media Relations at 202-885-5952.

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