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# Innovative and Traditional Journalism Nets Students National, Regional Awards

The Society of Professional Journalists recognizes HawkTheVote Media Lab for live election field reporting; The Hawks' Herald lands four regional awards in same contest



May 6, 2013 | Jill Rodrigues '05

**BRISTOL, R.I.** – In a constantly changing and challenging field, Roger Williams University's first group of journalism majors have been breaking fresh ground, earning the University's first national journalism award for their live 2012 election digital news coverage as HawkTheVote Media Lab. Campus weekly *The Hawks' Herald* also won four journalism awards – including best non-daily student newspaper – in the regional round.

The [Society of Professional Journalists](#) (SPJ) announced this week that four students who participated in the **HawkTheVote Media Lab** – Christopher Ferreira, Nicholle Buckley, Olivia Lyons and George Boveroux – received a first-place national award for Online News Reporting (small school division). They will now have a chance to earn an Excellence in Journalism award from among the best college journalists in the country at the SPJ conference, held August 24 to 26 in Anaheim, Calif.

The timing of the launch of RWU's new journalism major last fall, coupled with the 2012 presidential campaign and election, provided faculty members and students an opportunity to engage in an innovative and hands-on teaching approach from the start of the semester. As HawkTheVote Media Lab, students produced a series of video interviews, roundtable panel discussions and live breaking news reports from the field about the 2012 general elections and election issues relevant to students.

An interdisciplinary effort, the project bridged the fields of journalism, political science and computer information systems, under the guidance of Assistant Professor of Journalism Paola Prado, Assistant Professor of Communication Michael Scully, Professor of Political Science **June Speakman**, Professor of Web Development Alan Cutting and adjunct photojournalism instructor Kate Whitney Lucey.

Their live-streamed field reporting on election night deployed participating students across the East Bay area to cover local and national elections. Taking turns filming, producing, writing and reporting live on-air, they interviewed local candidates and reported election results in real-time. One team, comprised of students Kathleen Kiely, George Boveroux and Sam Wroblewski, even scooped local news outlets with their first reporting of June Speakman's re-election to the Barrington Town Council. The four teams in the field on election night filed their live reports via Skype and iPhones, which then were streamed live online via Ustream and broadcast over the air on WQRI.

"In the Department of Communication, we see the award as recognition that the new journalism program meets its promise of preparing students for the newsroom of the future. The students also seem to recognize that they are part of a cutting-edge program in a fast-changing field," Prado said.

Very few universities have ventured into this innovative and new approach to teaching journalism through creating and live-streaming field reports, according to Prado.

"Let others pine over the death of print newspapers. At RWU, we are re-inventing journalism education," she said. "We might be small, but we are nimble and that allows us to go where larger programs fear to tread."

To cap the project, students recorded testimonials about what they'd learned – skills like operating a studio camera, conveying information to website developers, landing an interview source, and how they overcame the challenges of scheduling, timely sharing of information and troubleshooting technical problems while in the field.

"I learned a lot about live news coverage and I gained a much deeper interest in politics from the experience working with HawkTheVote," said junior Olivia Lyons, who fulfilled the roles of copy editor and graphic designer on the winning team. "I also gained a greater interest in digital journalism. Initially, when I started out as a journalism student, I was much more interested in working in print media, but after I worked with the HawkTheVote team, I learned that digital media is something that I am truly interested in. This past semester, I enrolled in a broadcast news class to explore the digital world of journalism even further."

All of the students' work for HawkTheVote has been archived at [HawkTheVote2012.com](http://HawkTheVote2012.com).

## Hawks rolling in awards

Student newspaper *The Hawks' Herald* also scored SPJ awards in journalism, receiving four top placements in the small school division of the regional SPJ competition held April 13, which included universities from across New England, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

The student newspaper netted first place as Best All-Around Non-Daily Student Newspaper.

Kinsey Janke and Michelle Lee earned first place in feature writing for "[Replacing Calories to Erase Pounds](#)," an article that sheds light on "drunkorexia," a new college trend among female undergraduates who forgo food in lieu of alcohol to decrease their caloric intake.

Another first place win – for sports writing – went to Joshua Weinreb for "[Running Into Trouble](#)," a story about the RWU Cross Country team who were obliged to wear reflective T-shirts when training on Metacom Avenue, a dangerous main road with no sidewalks, because of complaints from the Bristol community.

And *Hawks' Herald* editor-in-chief Amanda Newman reaped second place for "[Affordable Excellence](#)," which detailed University President Donald J. Farish's announcement that [RWU will freeze tuition rates](#) and guarantee that rate for already enrolled full-time undergraduates and for next fall's incoming undergraduates.

"Awards of this caliber are unprecedented for the *Herald*, both as a publication and as a staff," Newman said. "Winning Best All-Around Non-Daily Student Newspaper is most definitely the icing on our proverbial cake of accomplishments. Additionally, it is truly an honor to have so many student journalists – all *Herald* editors – recognized individually for their hard work and dedication."

An entirely student-run publication, it is a challenge for the staff to publish a weekly 16-page paper while balancing their academic workload and extracurricular activities, according to Newman. Scoring these awards the first time staff have ever submitted their articles to an SPJ competition reflects the hard work and devotion each member puts into *The Hawks' Herald*.

"Every single person who works on this paper has poured their heart and soul into the inky content printed on its pages, and they have spent countless hours working tirelessly to make this publication the absolute best it can be," Newman said. She added that the resulting benefit for staff members is "actual work experience, which can open many professional doors, especially for students looking to pursue a career in communications, media, or the like."

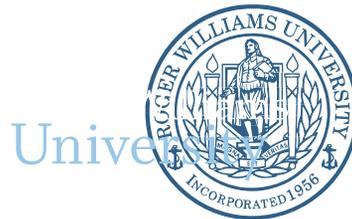
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