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## Howard University

HU Insight

*Howard University is one of the 2015-16 winners of the Challenge Fund for Innovation in Journalism Education. [See all 11 winners and the Honorable Mentions](http://journalists.org/next-gen/challenge-fund/2015-16-challenge-fund-winners/) (<http://journalists.org/next-gen/challenge-fund/2015-16-challenge-fund-winners/>).*

## Partners

- [National Newspaper Publishers Association \(http://nnpa.org/\)](http://nnpa.org/)
- [Trice Edney News Wire \(http://www.tricedneywire.com/\)](http://www.tricedneywire.com/)

## Team

- **Yanick Rice Lamb**, Associate Professor, Assistant Chair, Department of Media, Journalism and Film, Howard University, [@yrlamb](http://twitter.com/yrlamb) (<http://twitter.com/yrlamb>)
- **Ingrid Sturgis**, Associate Professor, New Media, Howard University, [@isturgis](http://twitter.com/isturgis) (<http://twitter.com/isturgis>)
- **Jennifer Thomas**, Assistant Professor, Broadcast News
- **Ron Nixon**, National Correspondent, New York Times
- **Ron Harris**, Editor, Howard University News Service, [@HUNewsService](http://twitter.com/HUNewsService) (<http://twitter.com/HUNewsService>)
- **George Curry**, Editor, National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service, [@BlackPressUSA](http://twitter.com/BlackPressUSA) (<http://twitter.com/BlackPressUSA>)
- **Hazel Trice Edney**, Editor and Founder, Trice Edney News Wire, [@TriceEdneyWire](http://twitter.com/TriceEdneyWire) (<http://twitter.com/TriceEdneyWire>)

## What are you going to test?

Insight is a non-profit, non-partisan website and digital network, run and edited from Howard University's Department of Media, Journalism and Film in the School of Communication. It will use journalistic skills and crowd-sourced information to play a leading role by examining claims about the black community in public debate. It will also serve as a fun but, serious learning environment for students to teach them advanced reporting tools in a way that is engaging and allows them to use the social media skills they already possess.

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## How will the experiment be conducted?

"There are more black men in jail than college."

"High rates of HIV among black women is being caused by black men on the 'down low.'"

"It's mostly black people on food stamps."

"Most crime is committed by black people."

"Black women have more children out of wedlock."

These are just a few of the claims made about the African American community in print and broadcast media outlets, talk radio and in daily conversations and online. And since most of the claims are never refuted or explained in context, they are repeated, recycled and ultimately become conventional wisdom.

Insight would serve as a counterbalance.

It would provide a weekly stream of articles, video, graphics, crowdsourcing and social media posts that would investigate and examine the claims by interviewing experts, examining documents and putting the information in the proper context.

Insight would be a web-based journalism site and digital network hosted by the School of Communications at Howard University and staffed by reporting students. Insight would serve two purposes: it would teach students advanced techniques in interviewing, research and writing and it would provide a public service by examining cultural, political and social claims made about the African American community.

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## **How will you know if it worked or not?**

Social media and site metrics, reader feedback and surveys to assess before and after attitudes/knowledge about topics. We'll also examine the growing involvement of citizens.

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## **How is this project unique and innovative?**

Fact checking journalism has emerged as a critical part of American journalism over the last decade. The number of fact checking journalism sites have proliferated, and most mainstream media organizations have them. One, Politifact, owned and operated by the Tampa Bay Times, was the first fact checking journalism site to win a Pulitzer Prize. The site serves as a check against the he said / she said mode of journalism that dominates most publications, except for the occasional investigative story. Despite the number of growth of these fact checking sites and their increasing importance to the field of journalism, there are few, if any, devoted specifically to examine issues of importance to the African American community. Insight would fill that void. And where other sites mainly focus on politics, Insight will broaden its reach to include any and all claims made about the conditions, habits or culture of the black community.

Insight will fill a void in the media landscape while raising the bar for professional and student journalists. It will challenge Howard students and faculty to run faster and dig deeper to find the truth about black people. Students will learn to look

harder behind the numbers, to question conventional wisdom, to veer from the pack of journalists, to maximize their critical-thinking skills and to develop a healthy sense of skepticism.

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## **What technology platforms will you use?**

In addition to web hosting, Insight would need a dedicated workspace, with additional Mac desktops and phone lines in Howard's Converged Media Lab, which is part of its developing Media Innovation Center. Working with our College of Engineering, we would develop an app for Insight and use existing open source tools (mapping, data visualization, database reporting) as part of the reporting and dissemination of findings.

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## **If it works, how might this experiment change teaching at your school or media practices in your partner's newsroom?**

We have reorganized departments in the School of Communications, revamping our curriculum as well as the leadership. While we have been using the teaching hospital model for quite some time, this experiment would allow us to push students to go deeper behind news and information to deliver a public service. The same is true for the NNPA, which often lacks resources. This project will help to supplement the small staffs of NNPA newspapers while not only helping to fill news holes, but more importantly by providing cutting-edge content. This would also provide more public affairs opportunities for students to cover Capitol Hill and federal agencies.

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## **Describe how the educational experience for students is above and beyond their current learning.**

The educational experience is above and beyond current learning by helping students step outside their comfort zones and think outside the box to refute or verify information. As part of our transmedia gentrification initiative, one potential project is to have students investigate the myths, truths and coincidences behind “The Plan,” a commonly held belief among black Washingtonians of a long-term, district-wide conspiracy to turn the “Chocolate City” vanilla or at least Neapolitan. This project, for example, would require extensive interviews, a deep dive into public records, analysis by experts to explain how various economic development plans might have contributed to this notion, etc. Insight will provide more engaging ways for students to learn about and use database reporting. We are also hosting an IRE watchdog workshop in March that will include a component on gentrification.

## About this Project

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