THE JUSTICE MEDIA CO-LAB

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Journalism is stronger when informed by and infused with data, which provide information about patterns that may be otherwise invisible. But many journalists lack access to "big data"—and the skillsets to interpret and use it compellingly.

Enter Boston University's Justice Media co-Lab, which supports the creation of excellent, data-driven journalism—and prepares BU students to leverage the power of computing and data sciences to advance justice and transparency in their future careers.

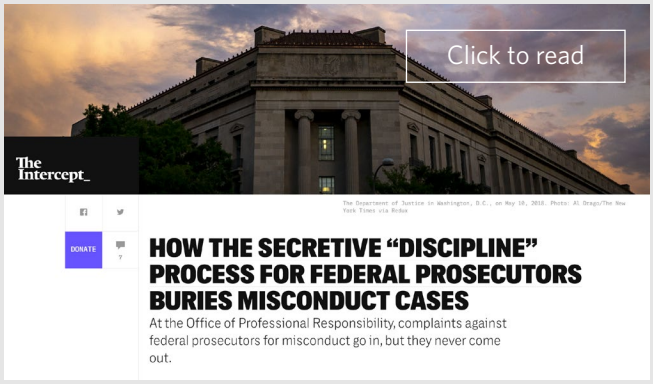
A partnership between BU's College of Communication (COM) and the new Faculty of Computing & Data Sciences (CDS), the Justice Media co-Lab engages faculty, students, and external experts in research and innovation collaborations and curricular and co-curricular programs with the potential for real-world impact. The theme of "justice" is interpreted broadly to allow for the exploration of a wide range of intersectional topics, from racial justice to environmental justice to issues of transparency and accountability—all with the public interest in mind.

Building on proven success

Since 2018, the program BU Spark! has partnered with other BU units, including COM, to engage students in computing and data science projects in support of external partners, including journalists. The students collect and analyze data to inform journalism, most of which focuses on issues related to social and criminal justice. BU Spark! operates under the auspices of the Faculty of Computing & Data Sciences (CDS), BU's newest degree-granting academic unit, focused on computational and data-driven discovery, innovation, and impact.

To date, these student/professional collaborations have resulted in the publication of incisive, data-rich journalism including investigative pieces on the share of public contracts that go to Black-owned businesses (WGBH), police campaign contributions (The Boston Globe & The Baystate Banner), and federal prosecutorial misconduct (The Intercept).

To date, more than 830 students in BU Spark! have completed more than 170 projects for external partners. Given the early success of the COM-CDS collaboration, and a continuing need for data-driven insights in investigative journalism, BU has formalized the partnership with the creation of the Justice Media co-Lab.



How it works

Building productive collaborations between disciplines as distinctive as computer science and journalism was a challenge in the past. CDS, however, is designed to cultivate such non-traditional partnerships, and to make data, computing, and data sciences far more accessible and useful for researchers and professionals in a broad range of fields. Through its Justice Media co-Lab, CDS provides:

- Curriculum development support and faculty stipends to facilitate the creation of interdisciplinary research and courses
- Project management of BU/external partner collaborations
- Expert oversight of student work on complex technical projects involving, for example, machine learning and data engineering
- Stipends for students working on projects in the Justice Media co-Lab

In the near term, projects in the Justice Media co-Lab will include the creation of AI solutions for addressing bias in media; the support of investigative journalism projects using advanced data science collection and analysis methods; the development of software engineering tools to facilitate the collection, publication, and the use of publicly available open data sets on behalf of media partners among others.

Donor support will not only sustain but also amplify all of the activities described above. Giving to the Justice Media co-Lab will help advance data-driven investigative journalism at BU, and help prepare future data journalists, whose fluency in computing and data science as well as journalism will help illuminate and ameliorate injustice.

To learn more, please visit bu.edu/cds or contact:

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