

SOC unveils investigative journalism fellowship

BY MATT GETTY

The School of Communication (SOC) and the Center for Public Integrity recently announced a new fellowship that should, as SOC journalism division director Wendell Cochran put it, “supercharge” the career of one emerging investigative reporter next year.

The American University–Center for Public Integrity Fellowship in Public Service Investigative Journalism will offer a journalist with at least four years experience a full scholarship, a \$2,000 monthly stipend, and the chance to earn a master’s degree while working side by side with the center’s award-winning, best-selling team of investigative reporters next year.

“Investigative journalism is a field where the opportunities for professional development are limited,” said Cochran on the reasoning behind the fellowship. “There are some opportunities like this for journalists later in their career, but we wanted to bring someone in a little earlier and give them the opportunity to work with and learn from some of the best in the business.”

In addition to his or her course load, the fellow will spend 15 hours per week during the academic year and 30 hours per week during the summer pursuing an independent or ongoing investigation under the center’s direction. Since its founding in 1989, the Center for Public Integrity, which serves as a watchdog on public policy issues, has produced more than 275 investigative reports and 14 books that have garnered journalism honors from PEN USA and been named to *The New York Times*’ best-seller list.

According to both SOC and the center, the fellowship solidifies an ongoing relationship. Numerous AU students have interned at the nonprofit, and several AU alumni currently work there. Two years ago, in fact, students in one of Wendell Cochran’s graduate seminars performed much of the public records and campaign finance research that helped Charles Lewis, the center’s founding executive director, write the best-selling book, *The Buying of the President 2004*. “We are so pleased to form a partnership with American University that formalizes a relationship that is already in place,” said Lewis on the fellowship’s announcement. “I doubt that *The*

Buying of the President 2004 would have been written on time and with such great success if it had not been for the AU students.”

Beyond solidifying a relationship between the university and the center and helping launch the career of an emerging investigative journalist, however, the fellowship also aims to make a contribution to the field of journalism itself. “The work that the Center for Public Integrity does is really a lot of what the mainstream news organizations should be doing, but aren’t,” explained Cochran. “So this is really an opportunity to expose the next generation of investigative reporters to the best of what journalism should be.”

Accordingly, for both SOC and the center, the fellowship represents an opportunity to reaffirm journalism’s dedication to public service. As SOC dean Larry Kirkman put it, “It’s not only SOC, the center, and the new fellow who will benefit from this program, but the American public who need and deserve the highest standards in investigative reporting.”



Wendell Cochran, SOC journalism division director, has high hopes for the new fellowship.