

from the director | jim detjen

Looking ahead

Knight Foundation awards Knight Center \$2.2 million



Jim Detjen is the director of the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism and a professor at Michigan State University. He is the founding president of the Society of Environmental Journalists and was president of the International Federation of Environmental Journalists from 1994 to 2000.

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation has awarded the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism \$2.2 million to expand its educational, training and research efforts over the next five years.

The grant, which is the largest in the history of the School of Journalism at Michigan State University, will enable the Knight Center to dramatically expand its programs. Since MSU has also pledged to contribute the equivalent of another \$2 million to the Knight Center, the actual value of the grant is more than \$4 million.

The Knight grant consists of \$2 million for expanded programs and a \$200,000 “challenge grant” to help the Knight Center build an endowment for its activities.

Here are some of the programs the new grant will be used for:

- Create an environmental specialization in the Journalism School’s Master’s Degree Program. This specialization will include courses in environmental science and policy, a required internship and a strong ethics component. The funds will also be used to create a course in environmental reporting for broadcast students.
- Set up a national “Boot Camp” for training environmental journalists. This week-long institute will be modeled on the successful Great Lakes Environmental Journalism Training institutes the Knight Center has organized since 1996 but will be national in scope.
- Organize international workshops for training journalists about environmental reporting. We will partner with other institutions to set up these institutes, which will likely be held in China and Latin America. These international workshops will be patterned after our highly successful workshop held in Mexico City in January 2004.
- Organize at least three environmental journalism summits and leadership retreats. These summits

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will identify and tackle some key problems facing the field of environmental journalism, such as the decline of environmental reporting on television and the shortage of journalists of color in the field.

- Organize weekend workshops for environmental journalists on subjects such as computer-assisted reporting, ethical issues faced by environmental journalists, land use and other topics.
- Develop online course modules on air and water pollution, land use issues, evaluating environmental risks and other topics. These courses and materials will then be available as training tools for journalists across the nation and the world.
- Write and publish a textbook on environmental journalism for use by journalism students and professional journalists.
- Increase the circulation and improve the quality of *EJ Magazine*.
- Expand the Knight Center Web site to include calculators and conversion tables, links to key Web sites, seminal readings and other resources of value to environmental journalists.
- Conduct practical research on topics, such as the state of environmental reporting in the United States and historical research on pioneering environmental journalists. The funds will also be used to assess the success of the Knight Center’s programs in educating and training environmental journalists.

This new grant will enable the Knight Center to almost double in size. We will gain at least two more

rooms and increase the number of part-time and full-time Knight Center employees from six to 13. The grant will also enable us to award more scholarships to support our students.

This new grant will enable us to dramatically enhance many parts of the Knight Center. It also is a symbol of how much the Knight Foundation values what we are doing. Since 1992 the foundation has given the J-School more than \$4 million to support MSU’s environmental journalism program.

Michigan State officials have also made a major commitment to our program. They have pledged to make permanent the position of assistant director of the Knight Center, a position ably held by Dave Poulson, an award-winning journalist and outstanding journalism teacher.

During our first decade at MSU, the environmental journalism program has steadily grown. When I arrived in January 1995 we had no students and no courses. Today, more than one-third of MSU’s incoming master’s degree students in journalism come to enroll in the environmental journalism program. Our Knight Center faculty has taught more than 1,000 students during the past 10 years.

We’ve accomplished a lot during the past 10 years in terms of teaching, outreach and research.

The Knight Foundation’s new grant will enable us to do much more.

The best is yet to come. 🌐