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Trickle Up Journalism 101: 10 1/2 Ways to Make Media that Matters

A couple of weekends ago I attended Free Press's National Media Reform Conference. I left the conference overwhelmed but the words of Democracy's Now! host Amy Goodman stayed with me. "Independent media broadcasts the voices of those at the target end of US Foreign and domestic policy. More powerful than any bomb, more powerful than any missile, the Pentagon has deployed the US media, and we have to take it back."

She urged us to create "trickle up journalism" built from our local communities. As we fight to take back mass media from the hands of a few corporate giants, we need to make media in our image that represent the complex, shifting truths of a multicultural society. Here are ten things you can do to help make that happen here in North Central Florida.

1. Get involved in a local organization working on Media issues

If you feel fired up about the horrible state of the Media, become a member **and** volunteer your time in a local organization. You can join the Civic Media Center (www.civicmediacenter.org), a volunteer-run non-profit that has been promoting the alternative, non-corporate press for almost 12 years. While you are there, ask the CMC why it is so far out of the loop that it hasn't started an IndyMedia site for North Central Florida (www.indymedia.org). If you have tech skills, maybe you could help start one.

For those who want to work within a specific political party, which means as a group you can lobby your elected officials; the Democratic Executive Committee (www.alachuacountydemocrats.org) has created a Media Sub-committee of their Issues Committee. Contact Susan Bottcher at swbottcher@swet.com.

If you are a student on campus you can join, Campus Counterpoise, a group of students interested in promoting the alternative and independent press. Be forewarned: they are in the normal summer lull that all student groups experience. Contact Larry Finn larryf@ufl.edu.

2. Make Low Power FM a reality in Gainesville

Way back in 2001 the Civic Media Center along with other groups in town applied for a Low Power FM license. Four years and a valiant attempt to meld the interests of three nonprofits with very different agendas later, Gainesville still is waiting for the FCC to grant the license. Get more information about how you can help from the Civic Media Center.

Also let your Congressperson know that you want her/him to support Senator McCain's Senate bill 312 "Local Community Radio Act of 2005." It will grant more licenses around the country and may help end the wait in Gainesville. For more information on how you can help Low Power FM, check out the informative and helpful Prometheus Radio Project website (www.prometheusradio.org/lpfm).

3. Public Access Television

Meet with city/county commissioners to voice how important a real Public Access TV station is to you. You don't need to take a lot of your time, only about ten or fifteen minutes, but these folks are working for you. Contact the North Central Florida Public Access Television to find out more; Raquel Garcia (rqgarcia@ufl.edu) or Mike Amish (mamish@ufl.edu). Or call 338-0803. To learn more about the wonderful things Public Access TV does around the country check out the Alliance for Community Media's website (www.alliancecm.org).

4. Support your local media.

Most of our local publications are labors of love, but they still cost money to produce. If you have a business, buy ad space in one of our many local publications. Buy a subscription for yourself. Make an extra donation. Read them. Complain when you don't agree with something. Compliment them when you do. Local media is very responsive to the community. The Satellite, The Gainesville Iguana, Mama Raga and The Gainesville Report (www.gvlreport.blogspot.com) are just a few examples of local media worthy of your attention.

5. Report for your local media. Be the media.

Local papers depend on local reporters. If you have an interesting story idea and are able to write reasonably well, you have what it takes to be a reporter. Have a story idea but are unsure of your writing skills? Submit the idea. Without meaning to, local publications get stuck in ruts because the same people are always submitting ideas and writing stories. Your story idea can help make sure these publications reflect the interests and concerns of a wider cross section of our community. Make your own blog. Produce a short radio or video piece and then air it online or at a community space. Write essays. Investigate a local issue. Help those without access to technology tell their stories. If you think I've slighted the work of your group, write a letter to the editor letting everyone know. Be the media.

6. Become a "Citizen Lobbyist"

You have sent countless emails to your representatives on all sorts of issues. Now it is time to do what the big boys do when they want something, schedule a face-to-face meeting with your elected officials. Get out your good clothes. Learn a few factoids about your elected officials like the name of their spousal units. Practice a good solid pitch with a friend; like sales and fundraisings you need to be able to say why the hell you're bugging them and what exactly you want them to do about it.

Check out Free Press (www.freepress.com) for information and links on upcoming legislative battles that need you: a few include making Digital TV broadcasters share the bandwidth, increasing the number of Low Power FM stations and a review of the horrible Telecommunications Act of 1996. Let's make lobbying into an activist art form.

7. Pressure WUFT Classic 89 FM to Diversify their Programming

Send WUFT Classic 89 FM some of your cold hard cash and then diplomatically pressure them to diversify their programming by airing more community based and public affairs programming. And I don't mean another music show on Sunday afternoon. I love

classical music, but I can check that stuff out from the library. If you are one of the many people who looks forward to getting in your car because that is when you can listen to WJCT out Jacksonville, FL, let WUFT know.

8. Watch/Rent/Check-out/Request Documentaries

Long before the Internet and even Michael Moore, documentary filmmakers have been uncovering vital stories and information. Put the heat on chain video stores to carry more documentaries. Join the CMC and check out its extensive video library. Request the public library order more documentaries. You can even rent films online from an alternative to NetFlicks, Liberation Video (www.liberationvideo.com). Go to the monthly documentary screening co-hosted by the Hippodrome and the CMC. The next one will be *Hotel Palestine: Killing the Witness* on Monday, June 7th at 7:00 and 9:00 p.m. at the Hippodrome.

9. Use the hell out of your local libraries

I've said it before, but the Alachua County Library District (ACLD) is one of my favorite things. The ACLD has a fine collection with a decent sized selection of books published by the alternative and independent press as well as listing a number of CMC titles in their catalogue. A little known fact is that you can request that ACLD order books you think would enhance the collection, and the staff will make a reasonable attempt to purchase it. And then lucky dog that you are, you get to be the very first person to check out that beautiful book.

The Civic Media Center has a great collection of alternative and independent press books, magazines, videos and audio recordings. The archives of alternative magazines and newspapers, including local publications, are beautiful. For a cheap \$10-50 (sliding scale), you can check out materials.

For those of y'all with spare money in your pocket, consider buying subscriptions to independent/alternative magazines for ACLD and/or the CMC.

10. Create a Community Wireless Network here in Hogtown

Free Press asks you to "Imagine a community networking system that any municipality, company or group of neighbors could set up themselves without expensive, proprietary equipment, overpriced "experts," or technology no one understands." Sound like afantasy? It is already happening all around the country and it should be happening here in Gainesville (and not just downtown). Check out Free Press's site on community wireless www.communityinternet.us or the Champaign-Urbana Community Wireless Network's site www.cuwireless.net.

10.5 Learn Something New About the Media

There are so many beautiful print, radio, video and Internet media projects out there waiting to help you learn more about making media that matters. If you are not connected to the Internet, visit your local library and the staff will be happy to help you learn more. Here are just a few websites that represent the rich diversity of media projects out there: www.reclaimthedia.org. www.democracycellproject.net,

www.youthmediacouncil.org, www.radioproject.org,
www.mediaempowerment.org and www.guerrillanews.com.