

Julia Randleman, Assistant Professor, School of Journalism and Advertising  
Molly Parker-Stephens, Assistant Professor, School of Journalism and Advertising

### **The Saluki Reporting Lab**

The Saluki Local Reporting Lab, a special project of the SIU School of Journalism and Advertising, is designed to give students from diverse backgrounds practical reporting experience while providing news coverage to underserved communities, a service that directly aligns with SIU's core mission.

Local journalism in southern Illinois is in peril. With legacy news outlets dedicated to the region shuttering and downsizing, much of the region is a "news desert" - an area with limited access to credible news and information. As the Illinois Local Journalism Task Force wrote in a January 2024 report, "An informed citizenry is essential to the health of our government on both the national and local levels, and reliable information is becoming an endangered resource as the news industry struggles with widespread technological and financial disruption."

The Saluki Local Reporting Lab will help fill that void. It is currently in its first semester, thanks to startup funds provided by nonprofit donors. Students' initial work is focused in Alexander County, which offers a lens through which to examine the impacts of government policies on deeply distressed rural areas. Work is expected to publish with Capitol News Illinois, the nonprofit wire service of the Illinois Press Foundation whose content is distributed to over 800 media outlets across the state. The Lab lacks funding for equipment, teacher compensation and long-term strategic planning, which the P.I.s are seeking through this grant proposal.