

M.A.ven Hour

Spring & Summer 2021 Graduates

A maven is “a person who knows a lot about a particular subject,” as described by Merriam-Webster.



Kurt Williams

Professional Project – “One fish, two fish, whitefish blue fish?”

Fish are big business across the Great Lakes Basin. The introduction of invasive mussels into the lakes has drastically altered the food web in the lakes raising concern that lakes Michigan and Huron are becoming less hospitable to iconic cold-water species of fish – trout, salmon and whitefish – most highly valued by the region’s recreational and commercial fishing communities. In conversations I’ve had with commercial fishers for earlier reporting, they strongly express concern that the health of the whitefish population that they depend on for their income is being negatively impacted by what they characterize as “excessive” stocking of lake trout in the lakes. For this project I am investigating whether there is evidence that state and federal agencies have changed how they stock the lakes with predator fish (trout and salmon) that would indicate that they have taken into consideration changes to the lake’s ecosystem and how their stocking practices might be impacting lake whitefish.



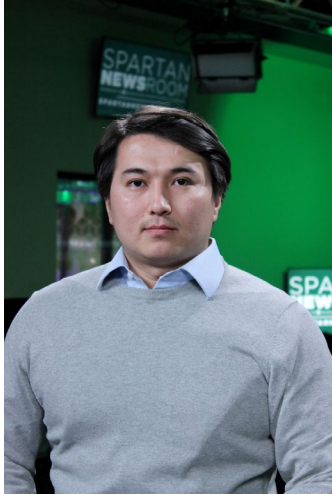
Marie Orttenburger

Professional Project – “West Michigan Up Close”

Science and policy are lofty subjects, often difficult to distill in a way that is accessible to a layperson. But it is nevertheless critical for people to understand how science and policy impact their lives and the lives of others in their communities. Journalists have the capacity to be brokers of this knowledge—packaging it in a way that makes sense in unique contexts for unique stakeholders.

The science stories I find most compelling invoke a childlike wonderment. I think that is the fuel of science: pure curiosity and bewilderment at the way the natural world works. Stories that capture that feeling can also cultivate it—and help the public become more familiar with the scientific process and the value of uncertainty.

I would like to explore this in a series of articles highlighting intriguing subjects that are tied to important science and policy issues in West Michigan. My project will include 3-4 longform stories that dive deep into organisms, ecosystems, and relationships characteristic of the West Michigan landscape, following the model of the “[Life Up Close](#)” series from The Atlantic. The series will be composed of written articles, developed through research and interviews with key subject matter experts, and accompanied by illustrations by artist Spencer High.



Zholdas Orisbayev

Professional Project – “Fact-Checking Issues in Kazakhstan During the Pandemic”

This interview-based project includes data on the fact-checking process collected from the Kazakh media market and information from interviews with dozen media professionals, who are based in Kazakhstan. The mission of the project is to identify fact-checking issues in the Kazakh media market and to present solutions not to be victims of fake news and misinformation, and disinformation.



Indri Maulidar

Professional Project – [Meliputbencana.org](https://meliputbencana.org), A Resource Website for Journalists Covering Natural Disasters in Indonesia.

Indonesia is a land of natural disasters and journalists are often at the center of it to inform the public while often risking their lives. [Meliputbencana.org](https://meliputbencana.org) serves as a resources website to help journalists, local and foreign, in reporting natural disasters in Indonesia with data points, tip and fact sheets, contacts, and other tools.



Rachel Hitchcock

Professional Project – “Those Who Told the Story: The Journalists Behind the Headlines of the USA Gymnastics Sex Abuse Scandal”

I’m interviewing and photographing journalists who covered the USA Gymnastics sex abuse scandal that permeated MSU’s campus and administration, as well as the highest level of U.S. athletics. I hope to further the discussion about the impact of that event on journalists by entering into conversation and collaboration with the reporters and photographers who documented it. I’m interested in their experience covering the story, how it affected them personally and professionally, especially in the environment that we find ourselves in within the U.S. and globally where journalists are demonized, harassed, and even killed for the stories they dare to tell. I will produce and publish a photo book that will provide a contextual framework for the story itself and the notion of trauma. It will include an introduction to the journalists, their portraits, interview excerpts, a handwritten word or statement from the journalist, and finally, I will conclude with an essay about the making of these photographs and interviews and the conclusions we came to together.



Weiting Du

Thesis – “ What’s Behind the Impact: A Case Study of a Chinese Photojournalist’s Environmental Reporting”

In 2014, a Chinese photojournalist’s report on a desert pollution issue in China provoked a top-level government investigation, which held dozens of officials accountable, and provided evidence for an environmental public interest case that led to a \$91 million environmental repair and restoration bill. But not all of his reports have gained such a great impact. Why? This thesis seeks to make sense of the different impact of three environmental stories reported by a Chinese photojournalist, Chen Jie, during 2014-2015.



Asha Dawsey

Professional Project – Internship with HOMTV, “Boxing Against Bullies”

I interned at HOMTV as a producer but I often find myself playing multiple roles within the internship. Going into internships or freelance projects and having the skills in multimedia journalism has been beneficial in executing publishable work. Overtime, HOMTV has given me a hands-on opportunity to exercise my journalism muscles with interviewing, editing, on-camera stand up’s, etc.

“Boxing against bullying” stayed dormant in my mind thinking of my time at HOMTV. Creating content for the weekly news broadcast for the Meridian Township government kept me structured when it came to being in a news studio and showed what is required. I met Kolmarge Harris while covering the annual Celebrate Meridian Festival and Food Truck Rally. He was introducing his after-school boxing program for students in the Lansing and East Lansing community. Growing up he knew about the damages bullying could do to children in their developing years as well as the fundamental benefits boxing provides.

Boxing against bullying, I can say, is my best piece. Having a concentration in visual communication, I enjoy making packages for news but doing humanitarian based documentary work on my own. Thinking of the day my piece aired I received so much positive energy but more importantly those that watched it felt for the children in the boxing class and the positive effect Harris had over them.

Those are the reactions that have kept me driven in creating and being an ethical reporter.



Denise Cayard-Spann

Professional Project – “Indianapolis Colt Overcomes Unimaginable Loss and Defines Personal Activism”

When Isaiah Rodgers was 15 years old, his father was shot and killed by police. Today, he’s preparing for his sophomore season with the Indianapolis Colts. The cornerback entered the league at a time when police brutality and Black Lives Matter have taken center stage. You would think Rodgers would be at the forefront of this movement due to his experience, but he doesn’t consider himself as an “activist”. This project is writing and pitching a profile on the cornerback’s journey to the Colts and why he’s not at the forefront of the movement despite his past.



Catherine Brooks

Professional Project – “Why Don’t I Matter?”

A round table talk podcast centered around the consequences of student media not being reflective of the black student plight. A key focus on universities not highlighting the struggle that it takes Black students to get there, the adversity they face while being there, and the world they face when they leave there. It starts small, so where’s the representation from their campus’s media?



Tasia Bass

Thesis/Professional Project – “The Crown Act: A Look at Satire and Humor in the News”

While the use of satire and humor to relay the news is not a new concept, more and more satire news shows are popping up. The question then is what and how does comedy work when relaying the news? How can humor be used to tell stories that often go unheard? And why are so many people drawn to satirical news shows. This project shall be a short thesis, explaining the power of using humor in the news alongside a recorded segment of taking a humorous take on an issue that is plaguing states, The Crown Act.