

Class will unite students, community radio

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By [Ben Weller](#)

Assistant professor Mike Conway thinks the news media are becoming too far removed from the communities they serve, and he's enlisting students' help to turn things around.

Students in J460 Community Journalism, a course being offered next spring, will work at WFHB, Bloomington's community radio station, as reporters, writers and producers for the station's news and public affairs programs.

"I've been thinking a lot about the importance of local news and community radio," says Conway. He thinks that journalism schools, with their emphasis on preparing students to work in major media outlets, often overlook other forms of newsgathering and reporting. "I want students to have an opportunity to look at other things out there," he says.

A board member at WFHB, Conway says the station serves an alternative source of news for members of the Bloomington community.

"If you're in a small community, where are you going to get your local information?" he asked. "When you have just one source telling you the news, you don't know what you don't know."

WFHB receives its funding from listening members and business underwriters and is run almost entirely by volunteers, with a small paid part-time staff, according to its Web site. The station plays music, runs the national news show Democracy Now!, and features programs written, hosted and produced by volunteers from Bloomington.



Photo by Ben Weller

Senior Sherhara Williams hopes to connect with Bloomington's black community as co-host of WFHB's Bring It On talk show.



Photo by Ben Weller

Graduate student Wolfgang Wichmann, is an engineer at WFHB where he often works on Bring It On. "Everyone that works in radio has to be crazy," he says. "You're sharing your soul and you meet people where they're not expecting you. Someone is cooking their food in their kitchen and they hear your voice."

Conway sees student involvement at WFHB as a way to educate students while building links between IU and the Bloomington community. "We've got great students," he says. "They ought to be working at WFHB to help make it a better station and to build a strong source of community news."

Conway hopes that working at WFHB will give his students valuable lessons not only in broadcast news, but also in civic engagement and in the nuts and bolts of non-profits. "I want them to see what grassroots radio looks like," he says. "You can't be above taking calls, pulling cable and cleaning up."

Several School of Journalism students already volunteer at the station. They say that, apart from the classroom credit some of them earn, the experience in real world journalism is valuable.

Senior Sherhara Williams is now in her second year as co-host of Bring It On, WFHB's African-American public affairs news program. Williams says she sees her work as a way to build links between the black student population at IU and the African-American community in Bloomington.

"A lot of black students latch on to the IU community, but it's more difficult to find the black Bloomington community," she says. "Bring it On reaches out to the black IU community and ties them into Bloomington."

Bring It On producer Clarence Boone appreciates her efforts to tap into the station's audience.

"Sherhara is doing a tremendous job," he says. "She's really honing her skills as an articulate and effective co-host. She asks on-point questions and challenges people she interviews to expand on their answers in a way that's interesting to our listening audience."