



# Shedding light on **POVERTY** AND **FOOD INSECURITY**

In TCF 444 Producing for the Newsroom and JN 417 Digital Community Journalism, students report and produce stories that raise awareness about the struggles many West Alabama residents face.

BY CARA WALKER

According to the Alabama Poverty Project, Alabama is the seventh poorest state in the nation, and rural West Alabama is home to several of the country's poorest counties. Food insecurity is prevalent among residents of the nine-county area.

In Spring 2015, students enrolled in The University of Alabama's JN 417 Digital Community Journalism course developed a Web project that documented food insecurity in West Alabama, while students in TCF 444 Producing for the Newsroom created an internationally viewed broadcast examining poverty in the region.

### Feed Alabama website

Molly Olmstead, a senior majoring in journalism who wrote a feature article about single mother Ros-

lyn Lewis, says interviewing Lewis about her family's situation was eye opening for her. "I got to know what it was like for her to get food on the table for her family consistently," Olmstead says. "I saw how different it can be to live below the poverty line."

Olmstead says Lewis, who cares for her 13-year-old son and 78-year-old mother, was eager to share what it's like to support her family. "She wanted the story to be out there so people would know the struggle," Olmstead says. "I wanted people to know that people who face this aren't lazy. They are just facing hurdles."

**Eighteen students in the Spring 2015 JN 417 Digital Community Journalism class produced 18 stories and accompanying photos for the Feed Alabama website after 14 students in Chip Brantley's JN 430**

**Digital Media Workshop class laid the groundwork for the project by designing the site, finding sources and collecting data during Fall 2014. The Feed Alabama website won an award for online news reporting from the Newspaper and Online News Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.**

Students taking Digital Community Journalism cover community news throughout the semester while also completing at least one special project that explores an important social issue, says Dr. Scott Parrott, an assistant professor of journalism who teaches the course. For their project, students in the Spring 2015 class had to work as a team, he says, to cover three major topics: access to healthy food, local food sources and people who are working to

ensure their neighbors don't go hungry. "When students become invested in our community of West Alabama, and when they critically examine the important issues facing our community, the experience can be life changing," Parrott says. "It can help students become more engaged citizens while also shining a light on our community's challenges and opportunities."

### Global News Relay

Dr. Chandra Clark, an assistant professor in the Telecommunication and Film Department, enlisted her TCF 444 Producing for the Newsroom class after UA was invited to participate in the Global News Relay, in which student journalists across the world report on a particular topic and what it means in their communities. Poverty was the theme in 2015.

**Students at each of the 11 universities produced 15 minutes of content about poverty in their regions, and the full newscast was streamed Feb. 26, 2015, on the Quays News YouTube Channel, where an international audience viewed it. Fifteen UA students reported, anchored and produced stories featuring or-**

### ganizations that help battle poverty in West Alabama.

Caitlyn Chastain, who graduated in 2015 with a degree in telecommunication and film and is now a reporter at WALB in Albany, Ga., produced a story about the West Alabama Food Bank and Alabama Credit Union's Secret Meals program, which partners with schools to secretly place weekend meals in children's backpacks. She says the skills she learned have helped her excel in her career.

"In news, you wear many hats, and I have to be able to jump in and help in any position at a moment's notice," she says. "A little over a month into my job, I had to produce a show and I only had two days of training. If it weren't for the skills I learned in the TCF 444 course, I do not believe I could have successfully produced and aired the show."

Clark says students were passionate about the issue of poverty in West Alabama, and this increased their motivation to produce high-quality work. "This was a major undertaking for our class," Clark says, noting much of the work was done during a week when inclement weather caused classes to be delayed

or cancelled. "I was really proud of what we accomplished."

**Students in the Spring 2015 TCF 444 class also live recorded and produced stories for the television broadcast of the annual Gene Stallings Golf Tournament benefiting The University of Alabama's RISE School. The RISE program serves young children with disabilities and their typically developing peers, and the golf tournament is its largest fundraiser. The event at Ol' Colony Golf Complex in Tuscaloosa was broadcast to the West Alabama area via the WVUA-23 station. TCF 444 students produced all the program's packages and stories, which featured volunteers, sponsors and children and families at RISE.**

*See the Feed Alabama website at [338.ua.edu/feed-alabama](http://338.ua.edu/feed-alabama). View UA's portion of the Global News Relay by searching "Global News Relay" and "University of Alabama" on [YouTube.com](http://YouTube.com). Both TCF 444 and JN 417 are offered each spring. For more information, contact Dr. Chandra Clark at [chandra.clark@ua.edu](mailto:chandra.clark@ua.edu) or Dr. Scott Parrott at [meparrott@ua.edu](mailto:meparrott@ua.edu) or 205-348-8612.*

**OPPOSITE, FROM LEFT: Journalism student Amy Sullivan interviews a volunteer outside the American Lunch truck, which provides free meals (photo by Ginny Sturgill); Telecommunication and film students produce a segment of the Global News Relay at WVUA-23 studios on the UA campus. BELOW: Still shots from the Global News Relay (top row) and stories from the Feed Alabama website.**

