Stanford’s School of Engineering and Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism Announce 2014-15 Magic Grants

Grants will fund eight groups of students, faculty and post-docs to develop media technologies that could transform how stories are discovered and told.

(May 6, 2014) — The David and Helen Gurley Brown Institute for Media Innovation has awarded its 2014-2015 “Magic Grants” to eight teams of students, faculty, alumni and post-docs from Columbia and Stanford Universities.

Offered annually, Magic Grants are made possible by a gift from longtime Cosmopolitan magazine editor and author Helen Gurley Brown, who established the Brown Institute as a partnership between Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and Stanford University's School of Engineering.

The winning projects include a mobile-based, augmented reality tool to expand the stories that museum curators can tell about works of art in their collections, a data-mining platform to reverse engineer ad-server algorithms, and a documentary, filmed with immersive video technology, that profiles 40 Iranian artists living both in and out of Iran.

David and Helen Gurley Brown believed that magic happens when innovative technology is combined with great content and talented people are given the opportunity to explore their visions of the future. The Brown Institute sponsors thinking, building and speculating on how stories are discovered and told in a networked, digitized world.

The following is a complete list of Magic Grants funded by the Brown Institute for 2014-2015:

**Art++:** Meaning *Augmenting Art with Technology*, Art++ aims to improve the experience of visitors in a museum gallery by proposing a new way of delivering information to them. Using augmented reality, Art++ will offer viewers an immersive and interactive learning experience by overlaying content directly on the objects through the viewfinder of a smartphone or tablet device. The Art++
team consists of Jean-Baptiste Boin, a PhD candidate in electrical engineering at Stanford University, and Colleen Stockmann, assistant curator for special projects at the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University.

**Cannabis Wire:** Cannabis Wire will create a highly visual and interactive data driven single-subject news site aiming to simplify the complexities of cannabis legalization and its role in the broader drug war and criminal justice system. The Cannabis Wire team consists of Alyson Martin and Nushin Rashidian, alumnae of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University and co-authors of *A New Leaf: The End of Cannabis Prohibition*.

**De-glass:** By revealing the mechanisms behind previously opaque advertising schemes at an arbitrarily detailed level, the De-glass project unveils today’s commercial and political tactics that are used to funnel consumers and citizens’ attention. The De-glass team consists of Charles Berret, a PhD candidate in communications at Columbia University, Cecilia Reyes, an undergraduate in computer science at Columbia University, and Max Tucker, a software developer at the Institute for Software Research.

**Earnings Inspector:** In direct response to criticisms of the rigor of business journalism, Earnings Inspector will provide business journalists a new tool to make the methods of forensic accounting more accessible. By sifting through a database of accounts of all public U.S. companies, Earnings Inspector will use fraud detection algorithms to report the likelihood of manipulated earnings. The Earnings Inspector team consists of Caelainn Barr, Cecile Schilis-Gallego and Daniel Drepper, students at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University.

**Reframe Iran:** Journalists can glean remarkable insights into the social and cultural tensions of a region by studying the lives and experiences of its artists. These insights are particularly important in countries whose cultures have been misconstrued by traditional reporting in mainstream media. Built on this notion, Reframe Iran will present 40 profiles of Iranian artists living both in Iran and abroad, using text, photo, and the innovative medium of immersive video. The Reframe Iran team consists of Matt Yu, PhD candidate in electrical engineering at Stanford University, and Alexandra Glorioso, Joao Inada and Matteo Lonardi, students at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University.

**Science Surveyor:** One of the biggest challenges facing science journalists is the ability to quickly contextualize journal articles they are reporting on deadline. Science Surveyor is a tool that can help science journalists and others rapidly and effectively characterize the scientific literature for any topic by providing a contextual consensus, a timeline of publications surrounding the topic, and categorized funding. The Science Surveyor team consists of Marguerite Holloway, director of science and environmental journalism and assistant professor at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University; Laura Kurgan, director of the Spatial Information Design Lab at the Graduate School of Architecture, Preservation and Planning at Columbia University, and Juan Francisco Saldarriaga, associate research scholar and adjunct assistant
professor of urban planning at the Graduate School of Architecture, Preservation and Planning at Columbia University. The Science Surveyor proposal also includes representation from Stanford – Laura Moorhead and Cheryl Holzmeyer, a Ph.D. candidate and a postdoctoral research fellow, respectively, at the Graduate School of Education, and Juan Pablo Alperin, a Ph.D. candidate with the Public Knowledge Project.

**Visual Genome:** Visual Genome seeks to enable journalists to effectively gather crowd-sourced breaking news images and videos in near real time, extract meta-data and relationships from these images, and utilize them to enhance the quality of their articles and reports. The Visual Genome team consists of Ranjay Krishna, a graduate student in computer science at Stanford Engineering, and Justin Johnson, a PhD candidate in computer science at Stanford Engineering.

**Widescope and Synapp:** Widescope and Synapp, a 2013-14 Magic Grant recipient, will receive renewed funding to scale up the current systems to achieve widespread usage and impact by partnering with governments, schools, and media organizations. Additionally, the team will further develop and implement algorithms and mechanisms for more effective aggregation and collaboration, all in an effort to posit online social media as an enabler of deliberative and participatory democracy. The Widescope and Synapp team consists of David Lee, a PhD candidate in electrical engineering at Stanford Engineering, and Sukolsak Sakshuwong, a graduate student in computer science at Stanford Engineering.

In addition to Magic Grants, the endowment gift from Helen Gurley Brown funds four fellowships a year, two at Columbia and two at Stanford. These will be announced at a later date.

**About the Stanford University School of Engineering**

Stanford Engineering has been at the forefront of innovation for nearly a century, creating pivotal technologies that have transformed the worlds of information technology, communications, medicine, energy, business and beyond. The school’s faculty, students and alumni have established thousands of companies and laid the technological and business foundations for Silicon Valley. Today, the school continues to seek solutions to important global problems and educate leaders who will make the world a better place. Learn more at [engineering.stanford.edu](http://engineering.stanford.edu).

**About the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism**

For a century, the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism has been preparing journalists with instruction and training that stresses academic rigor, ethics, journalistic inquiry, and professional practice. Founded with a gift from Joseph Pulitzer, the School opened its doors in 1912 and offers master of science, master of arts, and doctor of philosophy degrees. Learn more at [www.journalism.columbia.edu](http://www.journalism.columbia.edu).