

# MEDIA GIRAFFE Project

*Innovation for democracy;  
Standing above the crowd*

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## **MORE THAN 150 EXPECTED TO ATTEND SUMMIT AT UMASS AMHERST TO CONSIDER TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN CHANGES IN MEDIA, POLITICS; HELEN THOMAS, NEW ORLEANS EDITOR ARE KEYNOTERS**

**AMHERST, Mass.** — More than 150 visionary bloggers, political strategists, educators, technologists, media executives and citizen journalists will attend a summit at the University of Massachusetts Amherst June 28-July 1 to chart the future of journalism and democracy amid dramatic, technology-driven change.

The event, “Democracy & Independence: Sharing News & Information in a Connected World,” is described by blogger Frederick Clarkson as “studded with many stars of journalism and the Internet, both public and behind the scenes” who will contend “with the exhilarating and wrenching changes going on in media and politics.”

Among key participants or speakers are White House press corps columnist Helen Thomas, *Boston Globe* Editor Marty Baron, Boston.com Editor Teresa Hanafin, *New Orleans Times-Picayune* Web Editor Jon Donley, Newspaper Next Project Director Steven Gray, Center for Public Integrity Associate Editor Tom Stites and Common Cause President Chellie Pingree.

The summit is public and required registration is still open. For more information and a detailed schedule, go to [www.mediagiraffe.org](http://www.mediagiraffe.org) or call University Conference Services at (413) 545-0172.

“The businesses of print and broadcast media are challenged by Internet technology and our changing culture,” says UMass Journalism Professor Norman Sims, head of The Media Giraffe Project, which organized the summit. “We’re looking across media, politics, education and technology for specific ideas that may sustain the independent, watchdog journalism necessary for vibrant, participatory democracy.”

Other summit goals are to bridge the gap between new and traditional media, show and consider the impact of new media technologies on journalism and the public sphere, spotlight emerging business models, learn about technologies that are changing news economics and delivery, and share innovations in media-literacy education.

The event includes 27 sessions and more than 50 panelists and speakers, including the latest on news-industry research, a two-day “bootcamp” for citizens starting local online news sites, a seminar for journalism professionals on changes in newsroom culture, a gathering of New England political bloggers, and an afternoon workshop on making Internet videos that will include examples from a group of Vermont and Jordanian teenagers on a U.S. State Department-sponsored cultural exchange.

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Among summit participants are major U.S. newspaper and Web site editors and other news practitioners; political and public-policy strategists; info-tech pioneers and entrepreneurs; operators of local-news Web sites and blogs; podcasters and vloggers dealing with news, political and public-policy issues; academic researchers and students; citizens who want how-to knowledge about participatory media and people interested in new innovations in Web, print, film and audio news creation, delivery and financing.

“Constituencies from mainstream and alternative media rarely meet together,” says Bill Densmore, Media Giraffe Project editor and director. Yet new technologies are currently upending and interweaving the practice of journalism, politics and teaching.

Journalists see an erosion of traditional revenue sources which supported—and were supported by—their work, adds Densmore, and it’s not clear what will sustain traditional watchdog journalism, or how it will co-exist, or merge, with so-called citizen journalism.

“There’s an atmosphere of anticipation and intense experimentation,” Densmore adds. “To facilitate this, we’ve created a cross-over meeting place with an emphasis on discussion not speeches.”

Summit sponsors besides UMass Amherst include the Ford Foundation, Omidyar Network, The Boston Globe Foundation, MassLive/*The Republican* newspaper, Corante Media Hub, and the New England Press Association.

The Media Giraffe Project is a non-profit research effort housed in the Journalism program at UMass Amherst. It finds and spotlights “above-the-crowd” individuals making innovative use of media to foster participatory democracy and community.

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