On Campus

Media Institute Opens

Fall 2014

The Brown Institute for Media Innovation, established two years ago to support the development of new, high-tech methods of newsgathering and reporting, officially opened its doors at Columbia Journalism School in September, having renovated roughly a third of the ground floor of Pulitzer Hall. The space, which the institute shares with the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, features an open work environment with movable workstations, hardwood bleacher-style seating, and numerous projection screens — all of which are intended to make it easy for groups of people to come together and exchange ideas.

“This is a place designed for experimentation, for collaboration, for workshops and seminars,” says Mark Hansen, the East Coast director of the Brown Institute, which operates as a partnership between Columbia’s journalism school and Stanford’s engineering school. “We want to build a community of people within the school who are interested in developing new approaches to journalism and storytelling, connecting with students and faculty and alumni.”

The Brown Institute has maintained a high profile since it was created in 2012 with a gift from the late *Cosmopolitan* editor Helen Gurley Brown, despite lacking a home base until now; it has awarded eighteen “Magic Grants” to groups of journalists, historians, artists, engineers, computer scientists, and other data experts — led by students and faculty alike — who are collaborating on innovative projects using high-tech tools. The funded projects include an exploration of the lives of Iranian artists using immersive video technology; an investigation of the types of information the US government keeps classified using data-mining techniques; and a search for corporate financial malfeasance using forensic accounting tools.

Now that the institute has a proper home, Hansen expects it to become more integrated into the school’s daily educational activities.

“Part of our mission is to help acquaint the school’s general student body with data-

driven journalism techniques," says Hansen. "We hope that anybody who is curious about using computational methods will stop in."



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