



## Controversy in Wisconsin

The [Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism](#) is a non-partisan, non-profit news organization located in two small offices at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Its professional staff works with the university's journalism program. [Wisconsin state legislators added a provision to the state budget](#) wanting to boot the news organization from the university. Lawmakers also sought to prohibit university employees from working officially with the center.

Many news organizations, as well as the director of the university's school of journalism and mass communication, [Gregory Downey, did not agree](#) with the proposal. Ultimately, [the Wisconsin governor vetoed the budget's anti-journalism provision](#), saying that the state can't single out an organization among the many nonprofits that work at the university.

Discovery at three levels:

**Flashlight:** Student journalists can be as controversial as professionals, especially if they paint their schools in an unfavorable light. Ask students to research the answers to these questions: On campus, who seem to be the biggest censors of student journalists? What were last year's major court cases and the outcomes? What [Student Press Law Center resources](#) are available? Discuss in class. Encourage students who wish to do so to promote the center through their social network.

**Searchlight:** Ask students to research the Wisconsin stories mentioned above as well as this [Huffington Post article](#). Questions: Are the center's investigations needed? Why did some state legislators want to remove it from the university? What was the reaction? Ask students to use their research to create or beef up a [Wikipedia](#) entry on the center, citing sources carefully.

**Searchlight:** Research the law. Could a state have singled out a media outlet and banned state university employees from working with it? Invite [a local lawyer](#) or law professor to class to discuss. Did anyone ever actually do this? (Universities hold many public broadcast licenses, and experts [such as professor Barbara Cochran](#) of the University of Missouri say they should be more involved with their communities. Can a state stop professors from working with public broadcasters as well?) Ask your students to outline a letter to Wisconsin's governor expressing their views about his

decision.

**Extra credit:** This book's author argues that universities can improve journalism education through a "teaching hospital" model. Ask students to find an online forum where this issue is discussed, then post answers to one or more of these questions: Are there other possible conflicts to university-journalism partnerships? Should universities, especially public ones, avoid collaborating with media outlets? Do those in "teaching hospital" models need special protection from political interference?