2024 Technology Fee Full Proposal

Title: WRUF.com Redesign and Relaunch-" Creating an Industry-Standard Sports Media Digital Platform for Sports@CJC Student Journalism in Advance of WRUF's 100-Year Anniversary"

Proposer: Randy Wright, Executive Director and Rob Harder, Director of Operations. University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications, Division of Media Properties (WRUF-AM/FM/TV, WUFT-TV/FM, WUFT Classic, GHQ)

Sponsoring Organization: UF College of Journalism and Communications

Purpose and Specific Objectives:

WRUF-AM (850 khz, 98.1 mhz and WRUF.com) is one of the oldest radio stations in the nation, having first gone on the air in 1928, licensed to the University of Florida. Since that time WRUF has served not only UF but the entire north Florida region providing news, information and entertainment in addition to a worldwide audience via WRUF.com and an online audio streaming platform. In 2011, noting the rapidly growing interest in sports broadcasting and journalism, the College of Journalism and Communications modified the programming format of WRUF to totally focus on sports thereby providing an extraordinary "real world" media platform for CJC students to learn and fine-tune the broadcasting and sports journalism skills they were being taught via journalism department curriculum. This, combined with the launch of the College's official "Sports@CJC" program, has catapulted WRUF and WRUF.com into a leadership position nationally in terms of professional immersion opportunities afforded students. Now, in 2024, the WRUF.com digital platform, now more than ten years old, is badly outdated and creating challenges to faculty, staff and students wanting to ensure local content, the foundation around which media brings value to the community, is appropriately positioned and presented to the marketplace. Additionally, the immersive professional courses that CJC prides itself on are limited by the capabilities of the now antiquated WRUF.com design, capability and infrastructure. The modern media landscape for sports consumption has become fully multimedia, with an expectation from consumers that information will be curated in audio, video, text and social media. These stories are expected to be available on all delivery platforms including smartphones, tablets or desktop computers. WRUF.com, a site that many turn to for Gator sports information, must be modernized as a digital sports portal for the benefit of our student reporters and the tens of thousands of online users.

More consumers than ever are streaming their sports information as the days of sitting down in front of a television and watching whatever a channel offers at that time are waning. The value of video to sports coverage is expected to grow rapidly as more people get information from their phones and smart devices. Younger sports fans are turning less to live events than fans in the past and more to their devices for coverage according to a Deloitte study in 2023. Podcasting has also grown quickly as sports fans turn to reporters and influencers to dig deeper into their favorite teams. Therefore, we request $81,065 to build a sports content website on which students can add multimedia content and which will showcase the outstanding work of our students in the Innovation News Center and on WRUF, "The Home of the Florida Gators".

The current WRUF.com website was built over 7 years ago and is an "off the shelf" WordPress theme, developed in 2012, that is not specifically designed for our needs or a sports website. We would like to build a new digital home for multimedia content including directly connecting with our sports media infrastructure in the CJC. This digital sports portal will provide a home base for content from multiple sources, using dozens of categories to display our coverage of Gator Sports and sports all over Florida. The portal should have intuitive video uploading and sharing capabilities and be designed with smart devices in mind as the primary way the information will be consumed. Student sports reporters are limited greatly by the older technology of the current website. Currently, incorporating video is cumbersome. What is needed is a digital sports news source, built from scratch, that encompasses the structure of the top sports sites such as Foxsports.com and CBSsports.com, while innovating the use of direct live video from our students when needed.

Impact/Benefit:

We pride ourselves on teaching students the latest technology integrations with news reporting because it is important for potential employers to know that our students are industry ready with a little to no learning curve. The same is true for sports coverage. Our students will benefit from a multimedia sports portal because it will not just encourage them to be better multimedia reporters, it will require it. Their skill sets will expand with the platform's capabilities and audience expectations. This will give them a competitive advantage upon graduation. Our students in our sports Immersion Experiences (all student experiences share course number JOU 4201) are tasked with content creation to power WRUF.com and many aspects of the on-air broadcasts of WRUF.

The Orange & Blue Sports network, **(JOU 4201)** operated by students, deserves its dedicated section on the website. This quadrant will showcase their stories, podcasts, broadcasts, and videos. Providing a platform for students covering the Gators, the Orange and Blue Sports Network serves as a starting point for their development as hosts and play-by-play broadcasters. Emphasizing this through a permanent presence marks a crucial progression.

The student-hosted Sports Lab show **(JOU 4201)** would also have a dedicated section on the sports portal where consumers could watch and listen live, watch or listen to the podcast as well as to engage the show. Their program features coverage and commentary of Gator Sports, interviews with athletes and more. Being a part of the show trains students in show preparation and hosting. The sports portal, when integrated with the ability to host live video, would give the students an additional platform on which to create and innovate for our Gators sports audience. We would use V-Mix software and an additional AIDA PTZ-X12-IP camera for students to create video for the portal.

Adding the additional functionality, elevating beyond a traditional website will direct them to curate that aspect of the brand too. It would expand their skill set.

This sports portal will also have the framework that corresponds to our desired hierarchy of stories for the consumer. For example, it should be easy for our editors to highlight the most impactful stories on the site while other specialty content is added. The "top story" can hold the top position until such time that it is time to move on. This is not easily done today due to the limitations of the current website.

Finally, multimedia storytelling more closely matches the expectations in the industry. More and more, reporters are expected to know the basics of multiple platforms and it is likely that our students who wish to pursue sports reporting as a career will be contributing to a sports portal like the one we wish to build. In that case, we want them to be able to walk in the doors of ESPN, Fox, CBS Sports or Bleacher Report knowing that world and being able to flourish in it.

V-Mix is video streaming software that requires a license to use. This software allows users to produce, blend, transition, capture, and live-stream high-quality live productions seamlessly using a Windows PC or laptop. Using this software and dedicated cameras to capture sports content for the portal is valuable to our students as multimedia reporters and content creators.

We would use V-Mix to incorporate the live video aspect into the site. Our TAG team uses this technology already and would be well versed in the flexibility and integration opportunities with the new sports portal.

The current website plays a large role in our Student Immersion Experiences **(JOU 4201)** which includes the Intro to ESPN experience **(JOU 4201)**, ESPN Experience **(JOU 4201)**. Sports Director, Steve Russell and Director of Sports Journalism and Communication, Eric Esterline work with students daily managing their interaction with the current website and directing their activities in the Innovation News Center. A more innovative and powerful multimedia sports portal would open possibilities for storytelling that currently are not easily achievable.

A course taught by Dr. Roxane Coche **(RTV4930)** and a course taught by Ryan Hunt **(JOU4313)** also includes student contributions to the WRUF.com website.

Sustainability:

The IT team from the CJC would be able to update and maintain this site as that would be a requirement of the project. Since we have our own team, we will not enter into any maintenance agreements. While the new sports portal may also be built on the WordPress platform, the sites will be very different in their functionality.

Video – On the new site, video will be able to be uploaded and featured more intuitively. Currently the top third of our page is unable to feature video in our posts or at the top of the page. We would also like to be able to feature the TV feed from WRUF TV more prominently.

Functionality – For our students, we would want to have a site that could be updated easily so they can focus on content creation. This includes text, audio or video aspects of their story uploaded to our site with easily understood categories. Currently our site is more cumbersome to update due to it's age and limits of the template.

Branding – The expectation for WRUF.com is that it is a modern multimedia sports coverage portal focused on Florida Gators sports. As the flagship station in the heart of Gainesville, we have the potential to entrench ourselves and the CJC as the center of Gator sports coverage. At the heart of it all, with streaming audio, live and recorded video and sport news coverage will be WRUF.com.

Timeline:

Our goal would be to have the site reimagined and ready for launch in fall semester 2024. This will depend on how much time it takes for the company chosen to build the site to create the framework and design. Also, our IT team will integrate the site overseeing updates, security and testing before the portal goes live. TAG will work on the live video components with our programming team on WRUF to be sure that everything is as intuitive as it can be before the debut.

Month(s)	Action
July 2024	Funds Awarded
July 2024	Bids go out for site build – company chosen
July/August 2024	Procurement approval
August 2024	Equipment for video integration purchased
August 2024	Site structure determined with builder
August 2024	Site tests, edits
September 2024	Site goes live

Budget:

The cost of the project will mainly be in the site/portal development and design. For that we would look at companies who have designed similar multimedia news or sports-based information sites. We will want a company with experience with multitudes of users creating content with an information hierarchy that comports to a target audience expectation. For example, our target audience for Gator sports has shown that Gator Football and College Football in general are their main areas of interest. This changes somewhat seasonally, such as during the spring where Gator Basketball or Baseball may be more popular during tournaments or SEC play. We must have a digital home where content created by students can be showcased easily and intuitively in a way the comports with those levels of interest.

The companies we are targeting to provide quotes are XWP which, according to their information states their minimum project budget for acceptance is $50,000.

The other company to look at is HDC. The budgets on their projects tend to fall between $50,000 and $199,000.

Startup costs would include cameras for in studio and mobile applications, VMix license and the cost to get the site developed. Currently, our research into companies who do this shows that their jobs tend to run between $50,000 and $75,000. We will bid the job out to companies who have expertise in the space and who could provide the best product for our students as the most efficient cost.

We would also include 3 Canon cameras for mobile content creation including memory cards and cases. The cameras would be kept in a secure location and "checked out" by students.

Maintenance would be conducted by our current IT team who would need no more equipment to do so.

Items:

Item	Cost
AIDA PTZ-X12-IP Camera	$950.00
VMix software and license	$700.00
3 Canon XA60 Cameras	$4797.00
3 Cases for XA60	$552.00
3 128G Memory Cards	$66.00
Site Development	Est. $74,000

Technology Fee Full Proposal Template Sponsor Signature Form

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Note: By signing this form the sponsor is making a commitment to support the project. This may include providing startup, recurring or equipment replacement resources as presented in the attached budget.

Signature of sponsor: College Dean, or Unit Director, or VP for Student Affairs.

[signature] EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR 3/18/24

Name and Title   Date

Note: By signing this form the UF IT unit is making a commitment to manage the project if selected for submission of a full proposal. This may include providing startup, recurring or equipment replacement resources as presented in the attached budget.

Signature of unit UFIT Director of a core unit:

Mark McCallister   3/19/2024 | 11:38 AM EDT

Name and Title
Director, Academic Technology   Date