

Lauren Holladay

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A simple 10-word quote by James Madison perfectly sums up my approach to journalism.

He said, of a free press and free speech, that they are “the only effectual guardian of every other right.” Of every single citizen in our country.

Studying journalism at the University of Tennessee, I have spent the past three years proving that journalism is a pivotal institution that upholds every aspect of our democracy.

Now a senior, my drive to defend our democratic ideals has led me to becoming the managing editor of our student newspaper, The Daily Beacon. In this position, I lead more than 200 other young reporters, editors and contributors, coordinating coverage across sections in a 24/7 news environment and guiding story development from start to finish. Leading a student newsroom has taught me how to balance editorial judgment while making deadline-driven decisions, underscoring the importance of credible information in any community.

As an assistant to Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Chris Mooney, UT’s Chair of Excellence, I also produce data-driven reporting and research on important environmental issues. I contribute to coverage grounded in accuracy, verification and public responsibility, with a focus on clear, ethical and impactful journalism. The opportunity to work closely with a journalist whose career has centered on explanatory reporting has strengthened my interest in using data not simply to support stories, but to uncover ones that hold institutions accountable.

Similarly, as an accountability intern for the Knoxville News Sentinel, I work on community-centered stories supported by data, fact-checking and public records. Being part of a newsroom dedicated to transparency and public service has reinforced the importance of precision, persistence and context in every story.

And, working as a Dow Jones news intern at the Richmond Times-Dispatch this summer sharpened my skills as a detail-oriented editor while improving how I approach reporting. The experience strengthened my ability to craft clear and accurate journalism while deepening my understanding of the responsibility journalists have to their communities.

Looking ahead, I plan to pursue investigative work that allows me to explore complex topics in depth and tell stories with nuance and context. I am particularly drawn to projects that require patience, careful sourcing and building trust with the people and communities at the heart of the story.

These experiences shape how I approach storytelling and reinforce my belief that strong journalism is rooted in trust, perspective and attention to the people and places it serves. I am fully confident that my work changes lives. A life cannot truly be saved unless it is free — and I wholeheartedly believe that no one can truly be free without journalism.

Sincerely,
Lauren Holladay