

## Training Whistle-Blowers and Watchdogs

COM, Boston media collaborate on a center for investigative reporting

ACROSS NEW ENGLAND, news outlets are reducing their editorial staffs, dismantling investigative teams, shuttering Washington bureaus, and scaling back their coverage of state government. In an effort to keep the important tradition of investigative journalism alive, the College of Communication has launched a one-of-a-kind news center, where students and veteran local reporters will produce original, in-depth reports for area media.

The New England Center for Investigative Reporting (NECIR) promises to be a key component of COM's journalism program, acting as an incubator for the next generation of reporters specializing in long-form journalism. The nonpartisan center is funded jointly by BU and leading Boston media outlets, which are contributing cash, staff, and news resources totaling \$250,000, as well as private contributions and foundation grants, including \$250,000 from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Shrinking news budgets have meant fewer reporters are shining a light on the powerful and the exploited, says NECIR director Joe Bergantino, a COM adjunct faculty member and an Emmy Award-winning broadcast journalist, who headed WBZ's investigative I-Team for seventeen years.

"Our core belief is that investigative reporting is one of democracy's most important tools for providing citizens with the information they need to hold the powerful accountable and to make informed decisions," says Bergantino. "What our founding fathers intended when they came up with the First Amendment was to make sure there was an institution in place that would be a watchdog, and when you take

investigative reporting out of the mix, that role disappears."

The New England Center for Investigative Reporting is the first nonprofit, university-based, multimedia investigative reporting entity in the nation to focus exclusively on local and regional issues.

The center hopes to produce high-quality, high-impact investigative reports that will be published and aired by multiple media partners, such as the *Boston Globe*, New England Cable News, boston.com, and WBUR, Boston University's National Public Radio affiliate, and to train the next crop of investigative reporters, including students at Boston University and at Boston's inner-city high schools.

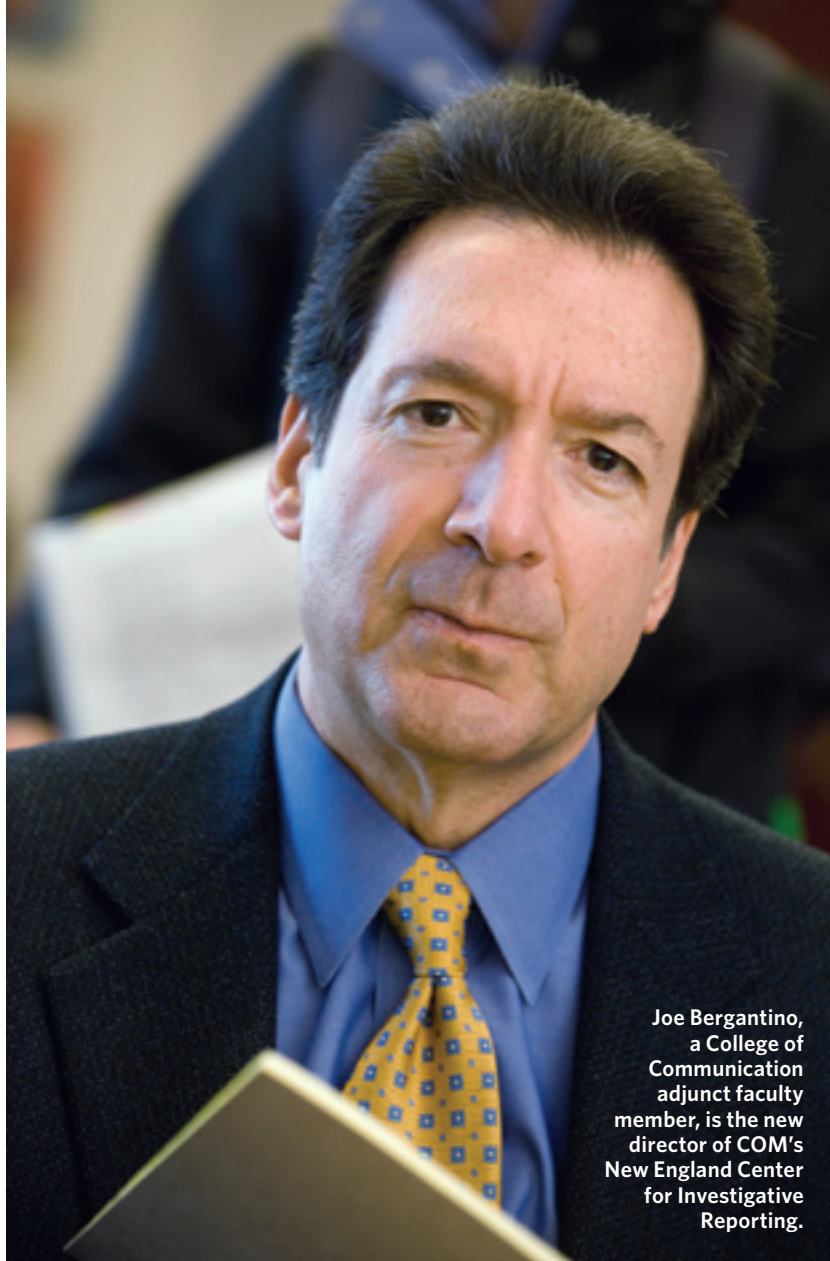
Taking theories out of the classroom and into the street will be a core prin-

ciple of NECIR, says Tom Fiedler (COM'71), dean of COM. "Just as medical schools serve the dual purpose of training physicians while serving the health needs of patients, NECIR will train reporters while serving the community's civic health with its in-depth investigative reporting."

Fiedler, a Pulitzer Prize winner and former executive editor of the *Miami Herald*, says establishing the center at a university like BU could, if replicated across the country, represent a critical development in the future of journalism.

"We may be creating a new model by which investigative journalism survives and thrives, even if the business models that used to sustain it no longer work," Fiedler says.

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Joe Bergantino, a College of Communication adjunct faculty member, is the new director of COM's New England Center for Investigative Reporting.