

## Call For Proposals

### Media Industries and AI: Critical Research on Emerging Trends

#### Carsey-Wolf Center, University of California-Santa Barbara

Deadline: September 15, 2025

With the roll-out of artificial intelligence tools (AI) in all areas of the media industries, there is a growing need for scholarly analysis of the ways systems of automation, predictive analytics, and recommendation are transforming film, television, gaming, music, and other forms of digital entertainment. Media scholars have already begun to conduct important research in this area. AI tools such as Showrunner AI, Deep Editor, Respeecher, and Runway Gen-3 are transforming the production of media content and the roles of creative workers from actors, cinematographers, and editors to sound designers and makeup artists. There is a long history of technological change in the entertainment industries, but the current conjecture has brought sudden and dramatic transformations that demand investigation by media industry and technology scholars.

The [Carsey-Wolf Center](#) (CWC) at UC Santa Barbara is assembling a team of academic researchers for a new initiative on Media Industries and AI led by Professors Jennifer Holt, Ross Melnick, and Lisa Parks. In the past, the CWC has led major media industry research initiatives resulting in white papers, conferences, and books such as: *Connected Viewing: Selling, Streaming and Sharing Media in the Digital Age* (ed. by Jennifer Holt & Kevin Sanson); *Distribution Revolution* (ed. by Michael Curtin, Jennifer Holt, & Kevin Sanson); and *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor* (ed. by Michel Curtin & Kevin Sanson). During the current period, we encourage innovative research proposals to study the relationship between media industries and AI from a wide range of perspectives and methodologies. Possible areas of focus are outlined below.

**Production:** How are uses of AI tools by media industry creatives altering production processes, narrative, and content creation? Which tools and software are currently used by creatives, and which are in development? What does the workflow now look like, and what are the critical impacts on storytelling and creativity?

**Labor:** How are work roles changing in the media industries in the context of AI tools (for screenwriters and showrunners as well as directors, voiceover artists, animators, production designers, and studio admin work)? Which positions are becoming obsolete? What kind of new jobs are emerging? How are creative workers and unions negotiating these processes? What kind of workers or roles will be needed in the next 5-10 years?

**Markets and Audience Behavior:** How are AI tools being used on the backends of streaming platforms to conduct audience and market analysis, or to “engineer” audiences for certain types of content? How is the function of ratings changing in the context of AI? What emergent measurement systems and metrics are being used to assess the “success” of content?

**Distribution and Exhibition:** How is AI being used by companies like Netflix, Amazon, and YouTube to engineer consumer platform personalization and algorithmic delivery of entertainment and information content? What are the effects of these processes on development, content creation, politics, and culture? How are AI systems impacting the sharing of information and content, and/or the licensing of broadcast series/shows and theatrical exhibition strategies?

**Intellectual Property and the Law:** How is the use of AI tools interwoven with copyright intellectual property issues? What kinds of licensing agreements are emerging? What is the status of lawsuits filed by content owners? We seek research projects that include these and/or other inquiries related to the effects of AI on media industries and the law.

**Industry Dynamics:** Which companies are the major players in this emerging space? Are they in Hollywood / Silicon Valley? What kind of conglomeration/concentration is happening across these sectors relative to AI? Who is maintaining or gaining power and why? What independent companies have emerged and gained power or been acquired? What emergent or new infrastructure is required to support AI in the media industries?

**Regulation, Ethics, and Public Policy:** What are regulators doing about AI technologies nationally or internationally that may impact the media industries? How do pending copyright lawsuits involve and/or relate to media industries? How is public policy tracking, falling behind, and/or attempting to impact the use of AI within media industries?

All research teams will be invited to participate in two research presentations: a preliminary gathering in Spring 2026 and a final presentation of findings in Fall 2027.

### **To Apply:**

Please submit a proposal (maximum of 1000 words) and detailed budget for your project, along with a CV for each PI by ***September 15, 2025***. In the proposal, please be sure to include your research questions, research methods, and intended mode of dissemination. In addition to scholarly articles or books, possible results/deliverables might also include web-based projects, video essays, experimental demonstrations of research concepts, etc. Interdisciplinary research and imaginative methodological approaches are encouraged.

Funding for projects will be in the \$5,000-\$15,000 range per project. Proposed budgets may include funding for research-related travel, research assistance, equipment, and software. We are

unable to support any requests for stipends, course buyouts, or teaching replacements. Awards will be granted from Carsey-Wolf Center donor funds and may not be used to fund indirect costs. Funds will be transferred following notification of awards with more detailed timelines to follow. Budget tracking updates will be required at the first workshop in April 2026 and at the final presentation in Fall 2027. Separate funding will be allocated from the Carsey-Wolf Center for principal researchers' travel to the two research presentations; please do not include those items in your team budget.

Please submit completed applications using [this form](#) and direct all inquiries to graduate student researcher Kelsey Moore, at [kelseymoore@ucsb.edu](mailto:kelseymoore@ucsb.edu).

Awards will be announced by Wednesday, October 15, 2025.

**Timeline (all final deadlines for work submission are firm):**

- Deadline to submit proposals: September 15, 2025
- Anticipated decision/notification: October 15, 2025
- First research workshop and preliminary presentation: Thursday-Friday, April 30-May 1, 2026
- Final presentation of research outcomes: TBD, Fall 2027