

About cultural literacy and covering issues that matter

Dear Friend,

A few months ago, members of the journalism faculty at the USC Annenberg School for Communication met for a lunchtime conversation with Janet Clayton, a member of the Annenberg School's board of councilors and the former editorial page of the *Los Angeles Times*. We asked Janet, who is also an alumna of the school, what she thought a 21st century journalism school should offer its students. Young journalists, she said, need to acquire, among other skills, a cultural literacy that many working journalists still lack. Or put another way: the new generation of journalists educated at USC and elsewhere must know how to navigate in different communities with skill and sophistication to produce accurate journalism in an increasingly complex world. The first step in acquiring cultural fluency?

"Know what you don't know," Janet offered during lunch.

The graduate journalism class that produced this issue of *Watt Way* digital magazine is well on its way to acquiring those skills. Reporting from the neighborhoods of South Los Angeles, and from other communities across the city, we produced a variety of stories that explore questions of race and class in the region's public school systems. Brandon Bridges, Gloria Angelina Castillo and Matthew Mundy explore schools that serve poor, immigrant and homeless students. You will also read about the rarified world of private schools, as told by Yoo Mi Chin, and all the extras they offer their students. We also report about solutions. Carla Guerrero tells the story of one iconic program that attempts to close the achievement gap by preparing disadvantaged high school students for college.

The class also continued an education of another kind, illustrated by the multimedia report produced by Emily Pauker and Katie Riese about the role of education in the 2008 presidential campaign. The Annenberg School of Journalism's core curriculum requires students to acquire basic skills in, and an appreciation for, journalism across platforms. We'll enhance our students' learning next fall when *Watt Way* teams with Annenberg Radio News, under the direction of [Willa Seidenberg](#), to cover the rich reporting laboratory that is Los Angeles. Students in the education reporting class will contribute to the twice-a-week Annenberg Radio News broadcasts, and radio students will generate stories for *Watt Way*. We'll also include a lineup of business and economic stories produced by the revamped business reporting class taught by our colleague, [Laura Castaneda](#), a seasoned business journalist and author who has worked for the Associated Press, *The Dallas Morning News* and *San Francisco Chronicle*. And we will also add to our coverage long form radio work produced by a new class taught by [Sandy Tolan](#), a new member of our faculty this spring and an award-winning journalist.

We're also taking another step to train our students to produce smarter journalism. *Watt Way* and Annenberg Radio News will join forces with Metamorphosis, a project under the direction of [Dr. Sandra Ball-Rokeach](#), also the associate dean for faculty affairs at the USC Annenberg School for Communication. Sandra and her team of doctoral students apply precision to their studies about the ethnic and immigrant communities across greater LA, and

Metamorphosis studies will prompt our students – and our friends in newsrooms across the country who read *Watt Way* – to ask deeper questions about the cities and towns they cover. And we plan to involve community interests in shaping our coverage.

Our collaborative and ambitious venture received a generous boost from USC Annenberg Dean Ernest J. Wilson III who approved a \$10,000 pilot grant to launch our project. We also received \$2,000 from Michael Parks, the outgoing director of the School of Journalism, to support our work, and Michael and Patricia Dean, the School of Journalism's associate dean, approved additional money for *Watt Way's* webmaster. The funds will be used to support student workers, purchase equipment and fund research. We are indebted to both Ernest Wilson and Michael Parks for their support of our work. In the meantime, please visit the Metamorphosis website at <http://www.metamorph.org/> and listen to webcasts of Annenberg Radio News at <http://www.annenbergradio.org/> to learn more about the city we call home.

Finally, a word about the students who produced this stellar body of work. They graduated this May (Gloria Angelina Castillo actually graduated in December), and we wish them Godspeed as they assume journalism jobs from Los Angeles to New York. My personal thanks to Megan Chao, *Watt Way's* creative webmaster who worked so tirelessly to bring the last two issues of our magazine to you. Thank you for reading, and please join us next fall when we bring you more journalism about issues that matter.

William Celis
Associate Professor of Journalism
USC Annenberg School for Communication
USC Rossier School of Education (courtesy)