New ASU podcast asks: What if the future of news starts with people?

The Knight Center's Andy Pergam talks about redesigning journalism around trust, community and human experience

By Marshall Terrill , ASU News
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Story highlights

A new podcast from the Knight Center for the Future of News, is based on a simple premise: The future of news is not just a business problem or a technology problem, but a human one.

The podcast looks beyond journalism's usual conversations about platforms, paywalls, emerging technology and audience growth.

Andy Pergam, inaugural executive director of the Knight Center and professor of practice at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, will host.

Andy Pergam has spent his career thinking about journalism not only as an industry, but as a public service that has to keep earning its place in people's lives.

As the inaugural executive director of the Knight Center for the Future of News and a professor of practice at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Pergam guides efforts to reimagine how news serves the public through open, collaborative research and development.

His work begins from a deceptively simple premise: The future of news is not just a business problem or a technology problem, but a human one.

That idea is at the center of "Revision: The Quest for the Future of News," a new Knight Center podcast that looks beyond journalism's usual conversations about platforms, paywalls, emerging technology and audience growth to ask what news might become if it were designed around how people actually encounter information, build trust, make meaning and connect with the world around them.

To do that, Pergam is bringing voices into the conversation from outside the newsroom, including thinkers in music, technology, children's storytelling, media theory and disinformation research.

The Knight Center partnered with CitizenRacecar to produce the podcast, which released its first episode this week.

At a moment when AI is accelerating change, public trust remains fragile and younger audiences often find news by accident rather than intention, Pergam sees "Revision" as an opportunity for more than incremental reinvention. He argues that journalism must ask deeper questions about attention, ethics, community and value if it hopes to meet the public where it is.

ASU News spoke with Pergam about what journalism may be asking too narrowly, why outsiders can help newsrooms see themselves more clearly and what assumptions about news, audiences and truth may need to be revised.

Question: "Revision" is starting from the idea that the future of news is not just a business problem or a technology problem, but a human one. When you hear "the future of news," what do you think people in journalism are still asking too narrowly?

Answer: We keep asking how journalism survives — how we beat algorithms, get people to pay for news — and those are real questions. But as we've seen, the future of news isn't going to be unlocked by a better paywall strategy or audience development plan alone. It's going to be unlocked when we start asking what role information plays in people's actual lives, how they use it to make decisions, to connect with one another, to engage with the community around them and how they value it. Those are human questions, and journalism hasn't fully gone there yet.

Q: This podcast brings in guests from music, technology, children's storytelling, media theory, disinformation research and beyond. Why do you think the future of journalism may need to be imagined by people outside journalism, too?

A: If we just leave it to news people — who I genuinely admire! — we're leaving a whole lot of perspective on the table. We felt it was time to hear from future thinkers across industries to see where it could be instructive in accelerating our own transformation. These types of news-adjacent people, as I call them, share an ability to capture attention and have a deep understanding of how human beings actually engage with ideas, stories and each other. They've figured out things about building trust and loyalty and moving people that journalism can learn from. Over the course of this season, we'll bring in more journalism voices, but for now I thought we needed to open the aperture.

Q: One of the show's recurring questions is how people actually experience information, emotionally, physically and socially. What do you think news organizations have

misunderstood about how people perceive the world?

A: Most news organizations are still operating with a distribution model that assumes people come to us and arrive with some baseline intention to be informed. But what we know from research is that about half of Americans, particularly younger adults, stumble into the news rather than looking for it. It finds them — through a push notification, their ‘For You Page’ algorithm, or a WhatsApp message thread. That changes everything about how you think about presentation, tone, context and what it means to actually serve an audience.

Q: We often talk about restoring trust in news as if trust is something institutions can simply win back. What if trust has to be redesigned from the ground up? What would that look like?

A: That question sounds like it should be on “Revision!” Redesigned trust will certainly look a lot less institutional and more authentic. What we're already seeing is that audiences connect with real people who bring them information directly, not with mastheads or brands.

That doesn't mean journalism loses its role. If anything, our job of gathering and making sense of reliable information is more relevant than ever. It means we have to radically rethink our relationship with the people we're trying to serve, starting with actually engaging with them rather than broadcasting at them. That’s actually an exciting design problem, and I think we’re early enough in this moment that we still get to solve it.

Q: A lot of the conversation around AI and emerging technology is about efficiency, speed and scale. What questions should journalists be asking about meaning, judgment and human attention before they ask what these tools can do?

A: The biggest question isn't what AI can do, but rather what we want to equip it to do and how it does that work. We need to be clear about what values we're embedding in the process and who gets to decide. Governance is the key.

Editorial judgment, community accountability, decisions about which stories get told — those aren't inefficiencies to be automated, they're at the core of what journalists do. These are not technology questions. They’re questions of ethics and values hiding behind technological questions.

Q: The title of the podcast is “Revision,” which suggests both seeing again and changing the draft. What is one assumption about news, audiences or truth that you hope this series helps listeners revise?

A: Right, this is definitely a moment to re-envision, too. The one I keep coming back to is that incremental change, even a lot of it, is going to be enough. It won’t. The riptide we're facing as an industry is too strong for small adjustments. I think a lot of people in journalism know that, even if they're not saying it out loud.

What “Revision” is really trying to do is open up space for bolder, more honest thinking about what news could become. That means letting go of some conventions that have served us well, and genuinely opening ourselves to a radical rethink — experimenting with intentionality, with principles and with commitment.

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Main image



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Text image(s)



Andy Pergam