

Daily Tar Heel's 126th Anniversary Speakers



Ariel Zirulnick leads the Membership in News Fund, which supports experiments in robust membership in news organizations around the world. The fund is part of the Membership Puzzle Project, a public research effort to galvanize new ways of thinking about how to optimize all parts of a media organization for trust.

Prior to that, she was the director of The New Tropic, a local media startup in Miami that seeks to help curious locals understand, connect to, and explore their city through storytelling and events. The New Tropic is the the flagship publication of local media and technology platform WhereBy.Us.

Before joining The New Tropic, Ariel was a foreign correspondent based in Nairobi, Kenya, writing for publications like The Christian Science Monitor, Quartz, the Guardian, Foreign Policy, and the Washington Post. She was also the Middle East editor at The Christian Science Monitor, and held a hodge-podge of other jobs on the international desk there. She graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill with a degree in journalism and international studies.



Jason Zengerle is a contributing writer at the *New York Times Magazine* and a correspondent for *GQ*. He writes about politics, culture, and (when his editors indulge him) college basketball. He previously worked at *New York Magazine* and *The New Republic* and his writing has also appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Slate*, and other publications; and it has been anthologized in several books, including *The Best American Political Writing*, *The Best American Medical Writing*, and *Next Wave: America's New Generation of Great Literary Journalists*.

Jason graduated from Swarthmore College with a major in political science and a minor in art history. He lives with his wife, son, and daughter in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.



Melanie Sill is a Pulitzer Prize-winning editor and veteran news executive who held top leadership roles at The News & Observer of Raleigh, the Sacramento Bee and at Southern California Public Radio/ KPCC in Los Angeles. She now works as an independent editor and senior news consultant with a focus on local news and innovation in public-service journalism, including work with Democracy Fund in North Carolina, the N.C. Local News Lab Fund and the Membership Puzzle Project.

Throughout her career, Sill has championed journalism that empowers and activates individuals and communities through news and information and also by engaging people as participants and stakeholders in public affairs. At The N&O, where she began as reporter and became executive editor, she oversaw The N&O's "Boss Hog" series, which won the Pulitzer for Public Service. She also helped increase staff diversity, digital innovation and community impact in each of her leadership roles, which included four years as editor of the Sacramento Bee and five as executive editor and vice president for content at KPCC. In 2011, as journalism executive in residence at USC Annenberg, she argued for new approaches to building trust and civic value in news in a discussion paper, ["The Case for Open Journalism Now."](#)



Tyler Dukes is an investigative reporter on the enterprise team at WRAL News in Raleigh, N.C., where he specializes in data and public records. In 2017, he completed a fellowship at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University and currently teaches at Duke University's DeWitt Wallace Center for Media & Democracy.

Prior to joining WRAL, he worked as managing editor for Duke University's Reporters' Lab, a project to reduce the costs of investigative journalism.



Jane Elizabeth is the managing editor of The News & Observer in Raleigh, N.C. and The Herald-Sun in Durham, N.C. She has worked as a reporter and editor for five news organizations around the country, including the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and most recently The Washington Post; and was director of accountability journalism at the American Press Institute, a media think tank in Washington, D.C.

She also served as adjunct faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University, Point Park University and Old Dominion University. Jane holds a master's degree in mass communications from Virginia Commonwealth University, and was a 2017 Knight-Nieman Fellow at Harvard University.



Ryan Tuck is a product manager for news strategy at McClatchy, focusing on company-wide product strategies since late 2018. Prior to that he was a news director at Bloomberg BNA, overseeing a network of reporters, editors, and correspondents around the globe. Previously, he worked as an analyst in the user research division of The New York Times, where he started the company's first-ever reader loyalty insight

program. He also was an editor at The StarNews in Wilmington, N.C., and at The Pilot in Southern Pines, N.C.

Ryan was the editor-in-chief of The Daily Tar Heel, graduating with a B.A. in journalism and political science. He also has a certificate in technology and communication from UNC, and a J.D. from the University of Georgia. He and his wife, Melissa, have three children, Brooklyn, Rio and Indigo, and three dogs, and just relocated to Cary, N.C.



Sarah Brown is a senior reporter at *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, where her field of coverage includes student life, campus racial tensions, sexual assault and harassment, and state higher-education policy. Her bylines have been in *The New York Times* and other newspapers.

Sarah worked for the Daily Tar Heel throughout her time at UNC and graduated in 2015.



Courtney Mabeus is a staff writer at The Virginian-Pilot, where she writes about military and veterans in an area that is home to the world's largest naval base.

Mabeus previously worked at The Frederick News-Post, in Frederick, Md., where she handled computer-assisted projects and wrote about the Army and U.S. Department of Homeland Security's high containment labs before moving to criminal justice. She has also spent time at news organizations in Washington, D.C., and Fayetteville, N.C.

Mabeus received a bachelor's in journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2002 and her master's in multiplatform journalism from the University of Maryland in 2015. During graduate school, she worked on projects that appeared in The Washington Post and on NPR. She lives in Norfolk, Va.



Erinn Whitaker, a former senior analyst for the Central Intelligence Agency and US State Department, is a senior researcher at the Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A policy analyst with nearly 15 years of experience, she now specializes in how US "news deserts" are eroding key democratic institutions. This topic builds on Whitaker's previous

expertise in Russian domestic politics, where she scrutinized areas such as the Kremlin-controlled media environment.

During 2017-2019, Whitaker led Penelope Muse Abernathy's research team to produce the nationally-recognized report "The Expanding US News Desert." This report identifies the US communities most at risk and delves into the implications for the news profession and the country. Whitaker draws on this research in her capacity as a board member of the University of North Carolina's the *Daily Tar Heel*, which is an independent, nonprofit media lab for UNC and the communities of Orange and Chatham counties.

When Whitaker is not researching, she teaches a course "Writing and Briefing for Intelligence," helping students interested in careers ranging from public policy to journalism finetune their written and oral communication skills.

Whitaker earned a BA from Middlebury College, where she spent a year studying Russia in Siberia, and a MA from Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service. She speaks German and Russian.



Sharif Durhams is a senior editor for news and alerting for CNN Digital, where he oversees daily planning decisions for CNN's desktop homepage and mobile alerts. Durhams was previously a homepage editor at The Washington Post where he helped to structure coverage of the 2016 Olympics and election and directed homepage breaking news planning after the shooting of four police officers in Dallas and the announcement of Fidel Castro's death. His team helped The Washington Post surpass The New York Times in digital traffic for the first time.

Durhams created the role of social media editor and digital strategist for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, where he pioneered the paper's use of social tools to aid reporting and helped to restructure beats and departments for the digital era. He also worked as a state and local government reporter for The Charlotte Observer, where he won a Society of American Business Editors and Writers award for breaking news coverage.

Durhams is president of and a lifetime member of NLGJA — the Association of LGBTQ Journalists, an organization he joined in 2000. He's a member of the Online News Association and the National Association of Black Journalists.

Durhams studied journalism and political science at the University of North Carolina, where he was the first African American editor of The Daily Tar Heel. He is the 2019 DTH Distinguished Alumni award recipient.