Utah State announces inaugural CommQuest storyteller scavenger hunt

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Student journalists from across the Mountain West will battle to tell the finest stories — and make the best memories — during the first annual CommQuest storyteller scavenger hunt, this fall. At 3 p.m. on Oct. 30, teams of student journalists will receive a 24-hour news budget. The budget might include such tasks as:

- Record a podcast-style interview with a retired professional athlete whose last name begins with the letter “K.”
- Write a feature story about a person who doesn’t give candy to children on Halloween.
- Take a photograph that could run with an article about the Halloween weather forecast.
- Conduct a video interview with a public official on the subject of cats and edit it into a two-minute television-style segment.
- Take over the Twitter account of a local business (with permission, of course) and raise that business’ followership by at least 50 people.

“I’m excited about is the opportunity to remind people that journalism is an adventure,” said Matthew LaPlante, who teaches news writing and crisis reporting at Utah State University. “A lot of my students have heard that journalism is a hard business, that it doesn’t pay well, and that traditional news organizations are dying. There’s truth to some of that, but not all of it, and what often gets lost on people is just what an amazing ride it can be.”

LaPlante, who has reported from around the globe on sports, science, war, religion and other issues, said he wanted to give his students a taste of what journalism can really be like.

“It can be so eye-opening, so life-changing, and so much fun,” he said. “And it can be all of that in just 24 hours.”

The teams, which can include up to four students, will be given points for each task they complete and additionally scored by a team of professional journalists and public relations professionals for accuracy, creativity and technical skill. The winners will be announced the following week and honored at the department’s annual awards banquet.

To add to the challenge, team members must remain together at all times during the contest — a provision that will be regulated with periodic video check-ins from contest judges throughout the event. For safety, driving will be prohibited from midnight to 6 a.m., with the evening and morning driving shifts completed by separate designated drivers who are licensed, insured, and not members of the storytelling team.

Any student enrolled in high school or college in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Utah or Wyoming is eligible to participate. The registration deadline is Oct. 10.

To register for CommQuest, send the full names and birthdates of your team members, along with your team’s name and school affiliation, to matthew.laplante@aggiemail.usu.edu. Please include the subject: “CommQuest Registration.”