WISCONSIN STUDENT NEWSMEDIA ASSOCIATION

2026 COLLEGIATE
Better NewsMedia Contest

Contest Opens: November 4, 2026

Deadline: Monday, December 7, 2026

All entries must be uploaded by 10:59 p.m. CST

Entries must have been published between Jan. 1, 2026 and Dec. 7, 2026.

RULES AND CATEGORIES

CONTEST DIVISIONS

Division A: Undergraduate enrollment of 13,000 or more
Division B: Undergraduate enrollment of 12,999 - 5,000
Division C: Undergraduate enrollment of 4,999 or less

Entries will be merged into the next highest division if a category receives three or fewer entries.

ELIGIBILITY & ENTRY LIMITS

All student newspapers covering Wisconsin public and private college campuses are eligible. **Unless otherwise specified, each entrant may submit as many entries in each contest as desired.**

CONTEST WEBSITE

All entries must be submitted online through betternewspapercontest.com/WNAcollege.

Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s). Ensure the publication date appears on each page or screenshot.

If you need access to a PDF of your entry, please contact Denise Guttery at denise.guttery@wnanews.com for login credentials to your WNA-hosted electronic archive. **For all other questions, contact Laura Niemi at laura@mna.org.**

CONTEST MANAGERS

Each newspaper will be assigned a contest manager, who will receive a username and password. The contest manager can add authorized entrants, who may also submit entries. The contest manager can also opt to share his or her login information with staffers so that they may upload their entries. If you've forgotten your username or password, please contact Laura Niemi at laura@mna.org.

PAYMENT

There is a $10.00 entry fee for each entry. Please complete credit card payment **on or before the contest deadline**. The PayPal link is on the contest site.

AWARDS

Experienced newspaper professionals from the North Carolina Press Association will serve as judges. Winning newspapers will be notified after judging has been completed. Awards will be presented in Madison at the Branen Family Student Luncheon at the WNA Annual Convention on Friday, March 12, 2027.

Students and advisors receive free admission, just make sure to register first.

REGISTER FOR THE 2027 WNA CONVENTION

2026 Categories

1. General Excellence
2. Collegiate Journalist of the Year
3. Breaking News Reporting
4. Public Affairs Reporting
5. Investigative Reporting *** NEW ***
6. In-Depth Story
7. Lifestyle Story
8. Arts and Entertainment Story
9. Sports Story
10. Editorial Writing
11. Column Writing
12. Freedom of Information Award
13. Business Coverage
14. Technology Coverage
15. Environmental Coverage
16. Health Coverage
17. News Photography
18. Feature Photography
19. Sports Photography
20. Page Design
21. Use of Multimedia
22. Website

CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS

1. General Excellence

This is the top award in the WNAF Collegiate BNC. Entries will be judged on overall evaluation of the publication, with maximum point value assigned as follows:

- Depth, breadth and quality of news coverage: 25 points
- Quality of writing and editing: 15 points
- Design/layout: 15 points
- Photography/artwork: 15 points
- Editorial section quality: 10 points
- Sports coverage: 10 points
- Lifestyle coverage: 10 points

Instructions: Three (3) complete issues of the publication must be submitted as PDF(s) or e-editions. **Entrants must select one issue from the first quarter of 2026, one issue from the fourth quarter of 2026, and one issue of their choosing.** *Entries are limited to one per publication.*

2. Collegiate Journalist of the Year

This competition is open to any collegiate print or online journalist in Wisconsin. Criteria include the quality of the journalist's published work and their journalistic contributions to their campus, community and student publication. Nomination shall be made by the student's editor or adviser and shall consist of a letter outlining the nominee's contributions to journalism and samples of their work.

Instructions: Upload nomination letter as a PDF. Enter work samples as full-page PDF(s) and/or URL(s).

3. Breaking News Reporting

This award recognizes excellence in breaking news coverage, both in print and online. Entrants may submit online coverage from a 48-hour period surrounding the news event, as well as the edition of the publication printed in closest proximity to the event. Criteria include enterprise, thoroughness, objectivity, local importance, clarity and style. *A publication may submit an unlimited number of entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.*

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) and/or submit URL(s) for the coverage from a 48-hour period surrounding the event and/or coverage that appeared in the subsequent print edition.

4. Public Affairs Reporting

This award recognizes excellence in public affairs reporting, including coverage of student, local, state or federal government and how it affects the publication's community. Criteria include enterprise, clarity and relevancy. Editorials or columns may be submitted as supporting materials, but cannot be the main focus of the entry. *A publication may submit an unlimited number of entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.*

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) for story or story and sidebar(s).

5. Investigative Reporting

This award recognizes deep, watchdog-style reporting on a single topic, revealing information not previously public. Judges will consider depth of research, persistence, public records use, obstacles overcome, and impact on public policy.

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) for story or story and sidebar(s).

6. In-Depth Story

This award recognizes the best single story or series on a single topic that goes beyond the surface and requires more time, work and professional skill than general news reporting. Criteria include enterprise, relevancy, resourcefulness, originality, organization, clarity, use of sources and impact. Each entry shall consist of either a single story or a series on a particular topic. *A publication may submit an unlimited number of entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.*

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) for story or stories.

7. Lifestyle Story

Each entry shall consist of a single lifestyle article or lifestyle article and sidebar(s). Criteria include effectiveness of writing style, originality of approach and human interest. *A publication may submit an unlimited number of entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.*

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) for story or story and sidebar(s).

8. Arts and Entertainment Story

Each entry shall consist of a single arts and entertainment article or article and sidebar(s). Criteria include effectiveness of writing style, originality of approach and human interest. Entries may include, but are not limited to, profiles on artists or entertainers or coverage of an entertainment event. Entries shall not include reviews (these should be entered in Category 11 - Column Writing). *A publication may submit an unlimited number of entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.*

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) for story or story and sidebar(s).

9. Sports Story

Each entry shall consist of a single sports story, series or story and sidebar(s) on the same topic. Criteria include significance of subject, writing quality and thoroughness. *A publication may submit an unlimited number of entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.*

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) for each story.

10. Editorial Writing

Each entry shall consist of a single editorial. Criteria include quality of writing, significance to the school, importance of the issue, success of the argument on the reader and general impact. *A publication may submit an unlimited number of entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.*

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF or submit URL for the editorial.

11. Column Writing

Each entry shall consist of a single column, and may be a news, feature or humor column. Criteria include reader appeal, depth of material or research and clarity of writing. *Publications may submit an unlimited number of entries, but no more than two for the same columnist.*

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF or submit URL for the column.

12. Freedom of Information Award

This award recognizes the efforts to further the cause of freedom of information by best conveying an appreciation and commitment to the First Amendment, freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Entries may include editorials, news coverage, or community education based on information gathered through open meetings and/or public records—or a combination of these examples. Entrants may also submit a written description of how the reporter(s) and/or publication has exemplified or defended freedom of information principals. *A publication may submit an unlimited number of entries, but a staff member's name may not appear on more than two entries.*

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) for story or stories. If including a letter of explanation, upload as a PDF.

13. Business Coverage

This award recognizes exceptional business reporting. Entries may include a breaking business story, an emerging trend, or a broader issue. Criteria include accuracy and depth, clarity and insight, enterprise and creativity, and journalistic impact.

Instructions: Submit up to five (5) stories on a single topic by uploading full-page PDF(s) or providing URLs. Relevant sidebars and/or an explanatory letter may also be included.

14. Technology Coverage

This award recognizes excellence in technology reporting. Entries may include a breaking technology story, a developing trend, or a broader issue. Criteria include accuracy and depth, clarity and insight, enterprise and creativity, and journalistic impact.

Instructions: Submit up to five (5) stories on a single topic by uploading full-page PDF(s) or providing URLs. Relevant sidebars and/or an explanatory letter may also be included.

15. Environmental Coverage

This award recognizes excellence in environmental reporting. Entries may include a breaking environmental story, an emerging trend or a broader environmental issue. Criteria include accuracy and depth, clarity and insight, enterprise and creativity, and journalistic impact.

Instructions: Submit up to five (5) stories on a single topic by uploading full-page PDF(s) or providing URLs. Relevant sidebars and/or an explanatory letter may also be included.

16. Health Coverage

This award recognizes excellence in health care journalism. Entries may include coverage of a health news event, topic or issue. Criteria include accuracy and depth, clarity and insight, enterprise and creativity, and journalistic impact.

Instructions: Submit up to five (5) stories on a single topic by uploading full-page PDF(s) or providing URLs. Relevant sidebars and/or an explanatory letter may also be included.

17. News Photography
Each entry shall consist of a single photo (or up to three photos on the same subject) that is the direct result of a news event. Criteria include news value, enterprise, impact, composition, technical ability and originality. *Photographers may submit unlimited entries.*

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) and the individual JPG(s) for each photo.

18. Feature Photography
Each entry shall consist of a single photo (or up to three photos on the same subject) with human interest qualities. Criteria include creativity, impact, interest, composition, technical ability and originality. *Photographers may submit unlimited entries.*

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) and the individual JPG(s) for each photo.

19. Sports Photography
Each entry shall consist of a single photo (or up to three photos on the same subject) focusing on any aspect of athletics. Criteria include creativity, impact, interest, composition, technical ability and originality. *Photographers may submit unlimited entries.*

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) or submit URL(s) and the individual JPG(s) for each photo.

20. Page Design
This award recognizes excellence in publication page design. Each entry shall consist of a single page of the entrant's choosing. Criteria include creativity, originality, headline treatment, use of visual elements and white space, clarity and reader appeal. *Designers may submit unlimited entries.*

Instructions: Upload full-page PDF(s) of the publication page.

21. Use of Multimedia
This award recognizes excellence in storytelling using multimedia elements. Entries may include, but are not limited to videos, podcasts, photo slideshows and interactive graphics. Entries may be part of a project that also includes a print or online story or standalone pieces. Criteria include innovation, technical quality, impact and effectiveness of storytelling. *Publications may submit unlimited entries.*

Instructions: Submit URL(s) for multimedia elements. If part of a larger project, submit PDF or URL for accompanying story. Third party platforms, such as Storify, may be used to showcase digital projects.

22. Website
This award recognizes the best news website created by a college publication in Wisconsin. Entries are evaluated for quality of news and editorial content, ease of navigation, layout, use of visual elements, innovative advertising and revenue-producing strategies and the demonstration that the website fulfills a community role. Entrants are encouraged to include a letter of explanation regarding how staff utilizes the site to share news and engage with readers. *Entries are limited to one per publication.*

Instructions: Submit website's URL. If including a letter of explanation, upload as a PDF.

Questions?
Contact WNA Contest Coordinator Laura Niemi at laura@mna.org or 612-278-0226.