

2026 BATEMAN CASE STUDY COMPETITION TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY - STARCATS

CULTURE

in

COMMON

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In increasingly competitive and rapidly evolving communications industries, **students entering the workforce** must be equipped with both **theoretical knowledge and hands-on experience** using professional tools that drive modern public relations and media practices. However, many communication students graduate with **limited exposure** to the platforms and technologies widely used by industry professionals. Research conducted by the Texas State University StarCats revealed that many communication students lack experience with professional media and PR platforms used in the field. In a conducted survey of communication students within the Texas State University System (TSUS), **nearly half** of the respondents reported **never having used industry tools** such as media monitoring or press distribution platforms.

In response to this need, the StarCats partnered with industry leaders to launch the Culture in Common campaign. This initiative connects students, educators, and industry professionals through shared access to media tools, educational programming, and hands-on learning opportunities. To achieve this goal, the campaign focused on three key priorities: **expanding student exposure** to real-world PR and media tools, **supporting faculty adoption** through accessible training and educational resources, and **strengthening partnerships** between universities and industry professionals. What made the Culture in Common campaign distinct was its emphasis on storytelling as a core skill in public relations. The team launched a campus-wide Storytelling Competition that invited students to share personal narratives reflecting the experiences, traditions, and perspectives that shape their identities and influence the stories they tell as pre-professional communicators.

Rather than limiting outreach to a single campus, the StarCats intentionally expanded the campaign's reach beyond Texas State University. Through classroom visits, professional workshops, and digital engagement, the team connected with professors and students within **multiple TSUS institutions** and international programs, including **the United States, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands**. By combining hands-on access to professional media tools with a storytelling-driven competition and global academic outreach, the Culture in Common campaign created a collaborative learning experience that reflects the crucially global and narrative-driven nature of modern public relations.

CLIENT DIRECTIVES

ACCESS Newswire challenged Bateman participants to create a campaign that would increase awareness of its platform in higher education while positioning it as a valuable resource for professors and universities. To guide campaign strategy, ACCESS identified three primary objectives:

- **Integrate ACCESS Newswire into classrooms** by encouraging **professors to adopt the platform** as a **hands-on teaching tool** across academic disciplines.
- **Establish ACCESS** within university newsrooms and communications programs as a **trusted resource** for professional and educational news distribution.
- **Generate media coverage and thought leadership** that positions ACCESS as an **industry leader** supporting the next generation of communicators.

OUR IMPACT

"The various campus spaces that people navigate together through their social interactions form campus culture, which I believe includes more than traditional customs and specific student groups."
-Jaden Falet, Culture in Common Competition Winner.

8.7K

Public Informed

68.2K

Social Impressions

1.17M

Potential Audience Reached
via TXST Newsroom

697

Social Media Followers

365

Students Engaged

263

ACCESS Sign Ups

224

Unique Website Visits

4

Countries Reached

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Stories have been around since the beginning of time, shaping how we interact with the world around us. The emotional influence of storytelling becomes a useful tool for successful press communication because it helps get the attention of the media by creating memorable connections to the organization.

The 2026 Bateman Case Study Competition's client, ACCESS Newswire, understands this importance. It is a global media distribution and communications platform that helps organizations get their stories in the right places. ACCESS is now expanding to higher education by introducing an education program to students and professors, completely free of cost. The platform allows students to gain hands-on experience with press release writing, media relations, media databases, and social listening tools.

The program was created to address the gap students face when trying to put theory into practice. To understand this gap, the StarCats conducted a student survey to evaluate familiarity with industry tools and their perceived impact on career readiness. Findings revealed that while **71% of students** believe learning professional communication tools would improve their career readiness, only **13%** reported using PR distribution platforms and **12%** reported using social listening tools. (See A3)

Despite ACCESS Newswire's credibility in the PR industry, it faces issues of low brand awareness among universities and students. Findings from the student survey state that only **8% of students** were aware of ACCESS Newswire, and in a professor survey conducted by the StarCats team, only **25% of professors** reported using PR distribution or media outreach tools in classes. (See A3)

The StarCats team saw a chance to write the next chapter of ACCESS Newswire. By encouraging student storytelling of shared campus experiences and highlighting how storytelling is used in the professional world, the Culture in Common campaign would connect students to real-world communication tools and introduce ACCESS Newswire as a professional media distribution platform.

RESEARCH

Secondary Research

There is a clear gap between student preparedness and employer expectations. Research reveals **74% of students** feel **university failed to prepare them** for the real world and employers experience "large differences between the thinking of the students and the employers. Many of the differences related to skills." (See A1)

Through secondary research, the Texas State University StarCats discovered that digital platforms are adopted more successfully when introduced gradually to professors through **step-by-step onboarding**, which prevents instructors from becoming overwhelmed by new technology. Tools perceived as **useful and easy** to use are **more likely to be adopted**, though time constraints and faculty workload remain major barriers to implementation. (See A1)

Integrating real-world tools and industry **partnerships strengthens** university reputations while helping **bridge the gap** between **higher education and the workforce**. (See A1) Hands-on experiences using professional tools build student **confidence and career readiness**, especially when paired with **industry exposure** such as guest speakers and professional case studies that reinforce classroom concepts. (See A1)

Research also highlights **storytelling** as a critical element of effective press communication and audience engagement. Story-driven projects **strengthen emotional connection** with audiences while increasing student retention and empowerment in educational settings. (See A1)

Primary Research

Qualitative - In-Depth Interviews & Focus Group

Through **seven in-depth interviews** and **one focus group** with key individuals from varying departments on campus, including the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Athletics, Theatre and Dance, and the McCoy School of Business, we learned:

- Professors value providing students with tangible items to add to their resumes.
- Real-world tool experience is critical for career readiness.
- Students often struggle to connect press release writing with the broader context of media relations.
- Social media and digital platforms are the most effective channels to reach students.
- High cost is the driving factor for the lack of press communication programs in university settings.
- Communication departments are challenged by short staffing and often use direct methods of distribution rather than broad distribution services.

Quantitative - Student Survey

A survey was distributed through Qualtrics in the Texas State University System, garnering **229 responses** from students. To ensure accurate data, students outside the above areas of studies were filtered out.



Nearly half (47%) of respondents have not used any professional media or PR tools, indicating a significant opportunity for education and exposure.



Only **13%** reported exposure to PR distribution or media outreach tools, suggesting an underrepresented area in the curriculum.



71% of students believed that adding an educational program focused on professional media tools would significantly improve their career readiness.



65% of participants said they would recommend a course integrating professional media tools to peers.

Quantitative - Professor Survey

A survey was distributed through Qualtrics across the Texas State University System, garnering **18 responses** from professors.



63% of professors currently use design tools such as Canva, Figma, or Adobe Creative Cloud in class.



Only **25%** have introduced students to PR distribution or media outreach tools such as Meltwater or Muck Ruck.



53% said they were likely or somewhat likely to use such tools in the future if provided with adequate support.

Faculty requested more support through:

- Step-by-step tutorials (60%)
- Live demos from industry professionals (67%)
- Free trial access to tools (67%)
- Ready-to-use lesson plans (53%)

Both students and professors recognize the value of incorporating real world media tools into the classroom, but each group faces distinct barriers. Students require access and training, while professors need support, resources, and time-saving integrations.

These insights directly informed our campaign strategy:

- Equip students with engaging, hands-on access to relevant tools
- Provide professors with in-depth video tutorials and ready-made materials
- Advocate for more media tool literacy across college programs to bridge the gap between classroom learning and industry demands

TARGET AUDIENCE

Primary research conducted for this campaign reveals that **47% of students** usually hear about emerging media tools and programs from professors and classroom instruction. Based on these findings and the client's directive to prioritize academic adoption, the StarCats identified the following audiences in and closely aligned with the **Texas State University System**.

Primary Audience:

Professors involved in mass communication, communication studies, and business courses in the US and abroad.

Secondary Audience:

Students who often struggle to connect storytelling within the broader context of media communication.

Tertiary Audience:

Communication professionals and communication departments in and with close ties to the Texas State University System.

KEY MESSAGES

What is Culture in Common?

Culture in Common is a campaign celebrating storytelling and a competition inviting students across the Texas State University System to share stories about identity, culture and community using ACCESS Newswire's educational platform. The initiative teaches students how to turn personal narratives into professional, media-ready stories while introducing the real-world process of public relations storytelling.

Why It Matters

Storytelling is a core tool in public relations because narratives help audiences connect with and remember information. Storytelling shapes how ideas are communicated across culture and business, from brand messaging to interviews and career conversations. The campaign emphasized storytelling as a key communication skill through events, guest speakers, and engagement activities. ACCESS Newswire helps bring this concept into practice by giving students free access to tools that demonstrate how press releases are structured, distributed, and picked up by media outlets.

How to Engage

Professors can easily integrate ACCESS Newswire's free educational program into coursework to give students hands-on experience with professional public relations tools. Through the platform, students can practice writing and formatting press releases while also developing industry-relevant skills such as media list building, media monitoring, and social listening. Incorporating these tools into classroom assignments helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, allowing students to better understand how strategic messaging is created, distributed, and tracked in real-world public relations.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Challenge: A survey conducted for this campaign found **47% of students** had never used professional media or PR tools, exposing a gap between coursework and industry practice.

Opportunity: Create a storytelling initiative that introduces ACCESS Newswire by allowing students to share cultural stories through a professional media distribution platform.

Challenge: Faculty and professionals said **cost, time, and staffing often prevent departments from adopting industry tools**.

Opportunity: Schedule in-class demonstrations that introduce ACCESS Newswire directly within existing coursework, allowing professors to see the platform in action without requiring additional training time, staffing resources, or course redesign.

Challenge: After Texas Senate Bill 17 removed many DEI spaces from public universities, some **students felt uncertain about where their cultural identities belonged on campus**. (See A1)

Opportunity: Culture in Common creates a storytelling platform where students share cultural experiences and build belonging across Texas State University.

CAMPAIGN PLAN

GOAL: Increase engagement and adoption of the ACCESS Newswire platform among students, professors and communication departments in the Texas State University System by positioning ACCESS Newswire as a tool to amplify unique voices and storytelling.

Objective 1: By March 2, inform 600 educators and students in the Texas State University System about ACCESS Newswire's tools and services.

Strategy 1: Use classroom time to increase awareness of ACCESS Newswire.

- **Rationale:**

- **Survey:** 47% of students hear about new media tools in class, yet only 13% have used PR distribution platforms.

Tactics:

- Reach out to communications and business professors to schedule class visits
- Create classroom materials introducing ACCESS Newswire
- Visit classrooms to explain press release distribution and position ACCESS as a storytelling platform
- Offer students the chance to learn more about the platform by entering the Culture in Common Storytelling Competition

Strategy 2: Partner with professionals and campus organizations to host storytelling events.

- **Rationale:**

- **Secondary Research:** "Guest speakers [present] real-world cases and frequently referenced terms, concepts, and skills that have been covered in class, reinforcing the value of learning these fundamentals."
- **Survey:** The StarCats found that 67% of professors would prefer to have live demonstrations or guest sessions led by industry professionals when building confidence in learning a new PR or communication software for classroom use.

Tactics:

- Host "Paint Your Mark" storytelling event with student arts organization
- Create an event with a prominent alumna sharing the importance of storytelling in resumes and career conversations
- Hold a tabling event with a personal brand and career expert discussing storytelling in strategic messaging
- Introduce ACCESS Newswire at each event, highlighting its storytelling tools and capabilities while encouraging attendees to participate in the storytelling competition

Strategy 3: Leverage earned, owned, and shared media to educate students about Access Newswire

- **Rationale:**

- **Secondary Research:** "[Earned media] can help to position the practice's experts as thought leaders in their field, and thus build awareness of and credibility for the practice."
- **Interview Quote:** "One of the best ways to reach our students is going to be social media. So we'll use social media...that's a good way to kind of amplify the news that we're sharing." -Jane Kovaks

Tactics:

- Share digital flyers, graphics, and reel-style Culture in Common content on Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn
- Launch a campaign website as a home base to highlight the Culture in Common Storytelling Competition and the ACCESS partnership
- Distribute press release on the storytelling competition through ACCESS Newswire; pitch a story about the student winner through both university newsrooms and distinguished news outlets
- Identify campus ambassadors to share content to promote the competition and drive submissions within their campus networks

Objective 2: By March 2, position ACCESS Newswire as a credible sharing, and listening tool by engaging 150 students in the TSUS to use the platform.

Strategy 1: Create opportunities for students to build professional skills through use of ACCESS Newswire

Rationale:

- **Interview Quote:** "The more students can know about certain tools and platforms. I think it is helpful, whether there's training where they are trained or certified on a platform. I think that then would give the students something to put on their resume" -Judy Oskam
- **Survey:** 71% of participants in the StarCats student survey answered "Yes, Absolutely" when asked if professional communication tools would better equip you for a professional position post-graduation.

Tactics:

- Invite students to share personal stories about their campus culture in the Culture in Common Storytelling Competition
- Incorporate the ACCESS Newswire media database into the competition by having students use it to target specific journalists as part of their entry
- Partner with ACCESS Newswire to distribute a press release recognizing the top three stories in the storytelling competition
- Host workshops on press release distribution and media database building

Strategy 2: Provide experiential learning with ACCESS Newswire inside college classrooms

- **Rationale:** Students want courses with professional tools, and faculty requested tutorials and live demos.

- **Survey:** 65% of participants in the StarCats student survey said they would recommend a course integrating professional media tools to peers. In the professor survey conducted, 60% of faculty requested step-by-step tutorials, and 67% requested live demos from industry professionals when introducing a similar product
- **Interview Quote:** "When it comes to press release communication, students struggle to see the big picture when entering more advanced classes in public relations." -Jennifer Scharlach

Tactics:

- Host alumni workshops on press release writing and storytelling
- Activate social listening workshops on trends and audience engagement
- Integrate ACCESS Newswire into existing coursework via extra credit modules for educators

Campaign Plan (Continued)

Objective 3: By March 2, sign up 20 professors or communication departments in the Texas State University System to integrate the usage of ACCESS Newswire currently or into their future roles.

Strategy 1: Integrate ACCESS Newswire by conducting targeted faculty and communicator outreach.

• **Rationale:**

- **Survey:** 53% of professors said they'd consider using these tools with adequate support
- **Survey:** 40% of professors stated that time is a constraint, and 47% of professors stated that workload is a constraint when implementing new tools

Tactics:

- Develop targeted outreach messages (through email, virtually, and in-office) introducing ACCESS Newswire
- Utilizing leading student ambassadors to strengthen faculty connections
- Personalize outreach to professors and communicators about ACCESS implementation based on departmental needs
- Connect with Texas State University Querétaro (Mexico) and Texas State Study Abroad partners in the United Kingdom, and The Netherlands

Strategy 2: Integrate ACCESS Newswire through classroom resources and support

Rationale:

- **Secondary Research:** Perceived usefulness and ease of use have a strong influence on satisfaction and adoption of new learning platforms. Time and workload become a barrier when it comes to implementing a new curriculum. Without focused attention, faculty energy will go to the day-to-day activities needed to stay afloat (e.g. prepping for class, teaching, grading, meeting grant and paper deadlines, attending other meetings).
- **Focus Group:** "I think it looks really great like I think it looks like it would be very user friendly for students, which I think is a major thing, because it's hard to because then we don't have to teach them how to use it." -Focus Group Participant

Tactics:

- Create short onboarding videos for classroom use
- Conduct faculty meetings and platform walk-throughs
- Develop optional extra-credit modules and teaching materials

Strategy 3: Integrate ACCESS Newswire through distribution in University Marketing and Communications departments.

Rationale:

- **Interview:** "We're short-staffed like everyone [else]." -Twister Marquiss

Tactics:

- Personalize outreach to marketing and communications professionals in the Texas State University System
- Meet with administration to expand campaign reach through interpersonal connections
- Partner with Texas State University Student Government to promote ACCESS across Texas State University system campuses

EVALUATION & MEASUREMENT

Objective #1: By March 2, inform 600 educators and students in the Texas State University System about ACCESS Newswire's tools and services.

Culture in Common informed **8,730 educators and students** through classroom presentations, digital outreach, events, and student organization partnerships. **This surpassed the original goal by 1,455%**, significantly expanding awareness of ACCESS Newswire's platform and services across the TSUS community.

EXCEEDED!

Objective #2: By March 2, position ACCESS Newswire as a credible sharing, and listening tool by engaging 150 students in the TSUS to use the platform.

Culture in Common engaged **365 students** in using the ACCESS Newswire tools through demonstrations, classroom integration opportunities, and the Culture in Common Storytelling Competition. **This exceeded the objective by 243%**, successfully reinforcing the platform as a valuable professional tool for aspiring communicators.

EXCEEDED!

Objective #3: By March 2, sign up 20 professors or communication departments in the Texas State University System to integrate the usage of ACCESS Newswire currently or into their future roles.

Culture in Common secured **22 professors and communication departments** who committed to integrating ACCESS Newswire into their classes or future curriculum and communications planning. **This surpassed the target by 110%**, showing meaningful adoption of the platform within TSUS academic programs.

EXCEEDED!

Countries Reached



I began to understand that the things that make me unique are my background, my values, and my passions. These weren't things I had to adjust to or quiet; they were things that helped me connect.

-Aleida Ramos, Culture in Common Competition Finalist.

CONCLUSION

The Culture in Common campaign created a platform for students within the Texas State University System's institutions to share the stories that shape their college experiences. By connecting campuses in Texas, Mexico, and even Europe through study abroad partners, the campaign highlighted how students and professors from different cultures, backgrounds, and communities share meaningful experiences that unite them. Through this initiative, the Texas State University StarCats amplified the visibility of ACCESS Newswire while demonstrating how professional media distribution can elevate student voices beyond the classroom and storytelling in the professional world.

Through a multifaceted approach, including campus events, social media content, career readiness booths, classroom outreach, alumni and professional speaker engagements, presentations to student organizations, and a storytelling competition, the campaign successfully drove students and professors to the ACCESS Newswire platform while encouraging meaningful engagement with storytelling and professional PR tools. By meeting students in classrooms and amplifying their stories, the Culture in Common campaign provided hands-on learning opportunities while strengthening connections across the university system.

The campaign **surpassed all measurable objectives**, informing **8,730 educators and students**, engaging **365 students**, and onboarding **22 professors in four countries** to the ACCESS Newswire platform. The campaign generated **64,681 Instagram views**, **3,353 LinkedIn impressions**, **116 TikTok profile views**, and **two feature posts** on the Texas State School of Journalism and Mass Communication Instagram page. In addition, **687 outlets** published the competition press release distributed through ACCESS Newswire, and an additional potential audience of **1.17 million was reached** through a story featured on the official Texas State University Newsroom.

The storytelling competition resulted in three finalists, and all winning stories were distributed through ACCESS Newswire. By demonstrating the value of professional distribution in an academic setting, the campaign laid the groundwork for ongoing collaboration between universities and ACCESS Newswire, positioning the platform as a resource for future student storytelling, academic initiatives, and institutional communications. Culture in Common created a model for integrating professional PR tools into higher education while empowering students to share the stories that connect their cultures and communities.

CLIENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the success of the Culture in Common campaign, the StarCats recommend that ACCESS Newswire continue the campaign's most effective strategies while expanding academic partnerships to support long-term adoption in higher education. ACCESS should maintain classroom demonstrations and campus engagement efforts that introduce professors and students to the platform. In addition, they should:

- Develop a structured faculty ambassador program that empowers early-adopting professors to mentor other educators and share best practices for integrating ACCESS into coursework.
- Expand interdisciplinary outreach by creating tailored onboarding resources for majors outside traditional PR programs, such as advertising, communication studies, and theatre communications.
- Create ongoing student engagement opportunities such as storytelling competitions, case challenges, or student spotlights that encourage continued academic use of ACCESS Newswire.
- Maintain ongoing thought leadership efforts by publishing case studies, hosting webinars, and securing media coverage highlighting student success stories using ACCESS.

BUDGET

Team Budget:

- Craft Supplies: \$49.92
- Tablecloth: \$4.99
- Printing: \$5.15
- Trifold Board: \$12.79
- Kindle: \$159.00

In-Kind Donations:

- Website Domain/Subscription: \$57.00
- Event Supplies: \$16.76
- Poppi Soda: \$417.48
- Gift Cards: \$30.00
- Parking: \$10.00

Total Paid Budget: \$221.85

Total In-Kind Budget: \$531.24

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS!

