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Date: October 20, 2010
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Three Join UIS Public Affairs Reporting Hall of Fame; Pulitzer Prize Winning Editor to Speak

The Bill Miller Public Affairs Reporting Hall of Fame will honor three graduates from the University of Illinois Springfield’s (UIS) Public Affairs Reporting program who have distinguished themselves in the field of journalism. Susan Cornwell, John O’Connor and Barbara Hipsman will be inducted into the Hall of Fame at the Hoogland Center for the Arts in Springfield on Monday, November 15, 2010.

The Public Affairs Reporting (PAR) Hall of Fame was named in honor of Bill Miller, an award-winning journalist who served as the program’s director for 19 years. After a semester of classroom study, students work six months in the Capitol covering state politics under the supervision of professional journalists. More than 580 students have completed the program since the first class graduated in 1973. Illinois Issues, the state’s leading public affairs magazine, and WUIS-91.9 – the capital city’s National Public Radio station – established the bi-annual event in 2006. Both are units of the Center for State Policy and Leadership at UIS.

Susan Cornwell, 55, has been a working journalist for more than three decades and in several countries around the world. She interviewed pivotal world leaders, such as former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and wrote the first draft of history in Mikhail Gorbachev’s perestroika-era Soviet Union. Cornwell has reported on U.S. policies and politics from
Washington, where she has followed events on Capitol Hill, at the White House and the State Department. In 1996, Cornwell won the Merriman Smith award for presidential reporting on a deadline, given to one journalist a year by the White House Correspondents’ Association. She is currently a Capitol Hill correspondent for Reuters, focusing mainly on foreign policy. Raised in Metropolis and Edwardsville, Cornwell received her professional start in Illinois, working briefly as a copy clerk for the Alton Telegraph followed by her first full-time reporting job at the Springfield State Journal-Register. She received her bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and her master’s degree from UIS (then Sangamon State University) in 1979.

John O’Connor, 47, has been an Illinois state Capitol reporter for The Associated Press since 1998, focusing on a variety of enterprising and investigative pieces. He is the 2010 winner of the $10,000 Oliver S. Gramling Journalism Achievement Award from the AP for a year-long body of work that included reports on a secret early prison-release program that nearly cost Gov. Pat Quinn the primary election and forced changes in state laws requiring minimum sentences. Other articles included a report on the gaping racial disparity in school discipline that inspired a state legislative task force and an article on salary increases given to Quinn’s top staff—some topping 20 percent—during a budget crisis, that had prompted the governor to announce extra furlough days for all state workers. He was given the specialist byline “AP Political Writer” in 2005 for consistently breaking stories. Prior to working with the AP, O’Connor was a journalist at several Illinois newspapers, most recently the State Journal-Register (Springfield), the Bloomington Pantagraph and the Daily Herald (Arlington Heights). A native of Freeport, Illinois, O’Connor received a bachelor’s degree in speech communication from Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, before receiving his master’s at UIS (then Sangamon State University) in 1986.

Barbara Hipsman, 59, has been an associate professor of journalism and mass communication at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio since 1987, where she received the Distinguished Teaching Award in 1994. Previously, Hipsman was an assistant professor at
Bradley University in Peoria for three years and worked as Statehouse bureau chief for the Belleville News Democrat for six years. She is active with Capitolbeat, the national association of Capitol reporters and editors, as a judge, facilitator and presenter at national meetings. Hipsman remains current on journalistic trends, using sabbaticals spent at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Chicago Tribune, Arizona Daily Republic and Columbus Dispatch to study the effects of convergence, varying ownership and unionization. This spring, Hipsman will study cell phone usage in news gathering. She received a B.S. in journalism from Northern Illinois University in 1972 and her master’s from UIS (then Sangamon State University) in 1978.

Kathy Best, managing editor, digital news and innovation for The Seattle Times will be the keynote speaker. In 2010 the newspaper won a Pulitzer Prize for the speed and accuracy in its initial breaking news coverage (print, online and combined) of the shooting deaths of four police officers and the ensuing 40-hour manhunt for the suspect. Best works with a staff of 25 producers, designers and engineers at seattletimes.com and is the bridge between the newsroom and its online operations. Before joining the Times in 2007, she was the assistant managing editor for Sunday, national and foreign news at the Baltimore Sun; assistant managing editor/metro at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch; and assistant managing editor/metro at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. Prior to her move into editing, she was a reporter for 15 years in Illinois and Washington, D.C. A member of the PAR program’s Class of 1979-80, Best was named to the program’s Hall of Fame in 2006. She is a native of Sullivan, Illinois.

The Hall of Fame event will be held on November 15 at The Hoogland Center for the Arts, 420 S. 6th St., Springfield, beginning with a 5:30 p.m. reception, followed by the program and induction at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are $35 and may be purchased by contacting the Hoogland Center for the Arts at (217) 523-2787 or at WUIS.org.

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