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# MIZZOU

## Documenting the Future

Reality TV pioneer's \$6.7 million gift starts documentary program at J-School.



Jon Murray, BJ '77, speaks to a group of journalism students at MU's Reynolds Journalism Institute. Known as "the father of reality TV" for co-creating the MTV show *The Real World*, Murray's \$6.7 million gift to the J-School will establish a documentary journalism program at MU. Photo by Rob Hill.

*Story by Marcus Wilkins*

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**A**longside television news, documentaries have profoundly influenced Jon Murray's career producing TV programs and feature films.

Now, a \$6.7 million gift from the creator of MTV's *The Real World* will establish a documentary filmmaking program at the Missouri School of Journalism. Murray's gift is the single largest outright gift by an individual in J-School history and the only one that endows an entire program. The program will offer undergraduate and graduate degrees, and it is scheduled to launch in fall 2015.

"A documentary can be a wonderful way of elevating a conversation about a subject," says Murray, who announced the gift Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2014, at the Reynolds Journalism Institute. "A doc doesn't necessarily have to tell you how to think, but hopefully it can get you to re-examine something and come to a more educated opinion."

Murray, BJ '77, established Bunim/Murray Productions in 1987 with his late business partner Mary-Ellis Bunim. In addition to hit programs such as *Road Rules* and *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, Bunim/Murray has produced powerful documentary films, including *Valentine Road* and *Autism: The Musical*.

The program, which will be the first of its kind housed

in a U.S. journalism school, will include new courses outlining the history of documentary journalism, business models for the craft, and a broadcast lab. It also will employ three new faculty members.

“We have a mission to extend good journalism — with all the best practices, ethics and storytelling techniques — into new worlds,” says Kent Collins, BJ ’70, associate professor of broadcast journalism. “We have a mission to see to it that important issues get the best possible explanations.”

Although the curriculum is still being developed, administrators plan to work with the True/False Film Fest to provide summer workshop opportunities for students. The local festival kicks off its 11th installment Feb. 27, and founders David Wilson and Paul Sturtz have participated in the J-School program’s planning.

“The J-School can add a lot to the discussion about what constitutes good docs but also add a lot to the pedagogy of it,” says Dean Mills, the journalism school dean who steps down Aug. 31 and will direct the Reynolds Fellows program at the Reynolds Journalism Institute. “Every faculty group in the school helping to plan [the program] shows that there are no silos in journalism anymore. You have to be able to do it all — text, film, sound ... they all come together in documentary journalism.”

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