

Tuesday, April 15, 2008

## **University students fighting the spread of HIV with mobile media**

Athens, Ga. – A unique project by students of the University of Georgia's New Media Institute (NMI) may soon make wireless phones a new vehicle for Public Service Announcements in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

With the support of Verizon Wireless and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), project organizers hope to create a new production model that allows public service announcement videos to be created by peers and delivered on personal mobile media devices.

The goal of the AIDS Personal Public Service Announcement (PPSA) project is to increase awareness of the importance of HIV testing, encourage young people to get tested and pioneer new ways to reach young adult audiences with vital educational messages.

"Delivering health messages to young people today can be frustrating," said Scott Shamp, NMI director and professor of telecommunications at UGA's Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication. "A whole generation isn't using their parent's media, so we have to find new ways to reach them. Mobile media has powerful potential for reaching young people with information to help them stay healthy and protect others."

Coordinated by UGA's New Media Institute, the project will bring teams of university students and faculty from around the Southeast together on April 22-23 in Atlanta. Using wireless phones and data equipment, student teams from Emory University, the University of South Carolina, Clark Atlanta University and Georgia State University will collaborate using wireless communications with producers from around the country to shoot, edit, produce and premiere short video PSAs encouraging HIV testing.

"It's exciting to not only see young people using our equipment and our network in an innovative way but to see how this can directly impact individual lives and the community at large," said Jeff Mango, president of the Georgia/Alabama Region for Verizon Wireless. "Wireless technology has certainly become part of our daily lives both professionally and personally. It's only fitting that we harness the power and reach of technology for the greater good and participate in this program."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than a quarter million people are estimated to be living with HIV and are unaware of their infection. Often those infected exhibit no visible symptoms and are more likely to pass the virus to others. Knowing infection status can lengthen life expectancy dramatically as patients are able to start treatment earlier.

“Mobile media is an outlet for truly personalized content. It is an opportunity to reach a targeted audience in a personal way for the public good,” said Kelly Jones, a project participant and UGA student. “Especially for controversial and emotionally charged issues, personal devices are a discrete way to create awareness.”

Student teams will participate in a day of educational forums on HIV and related issues on Tuesday, April 22, including talks by professionals from a variety of organizations including top CDC experts on HIV/AIDS. Teams will begin video production at 9 a.m. on April 23 and end at 4 p.m. with final PPSA videos due by a 7 p.m. deadline. The AIDS PPSAs will be distributed via a variety of channels in association with a series of nationwide educational and promotional events associated with National HIV Testing Day, June 27. This annual event is organized by the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA).

Founded in 2000, the New Media Institute is an interdisciplinary teaching and research unit of the UGA Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication ([www.grady.uga.edu](http://www.grady.uga.edu)). The NMI is dedicated to innovating with communication technologies.

Verizon Wireless operates the nation’s most reliable wireless voice and data network, serving 65.7 million customers. Headquartered in Basking Ridge, N.J., with 69,000 employees nationwide, Verizon Wireless is a joint venture of Verizon Communications (NYSE: VZ) and Vodafone (NYSE and LSE: VOD). For more information, see: [www.verizonwireless.com](http://www.verizonwireless.com).

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