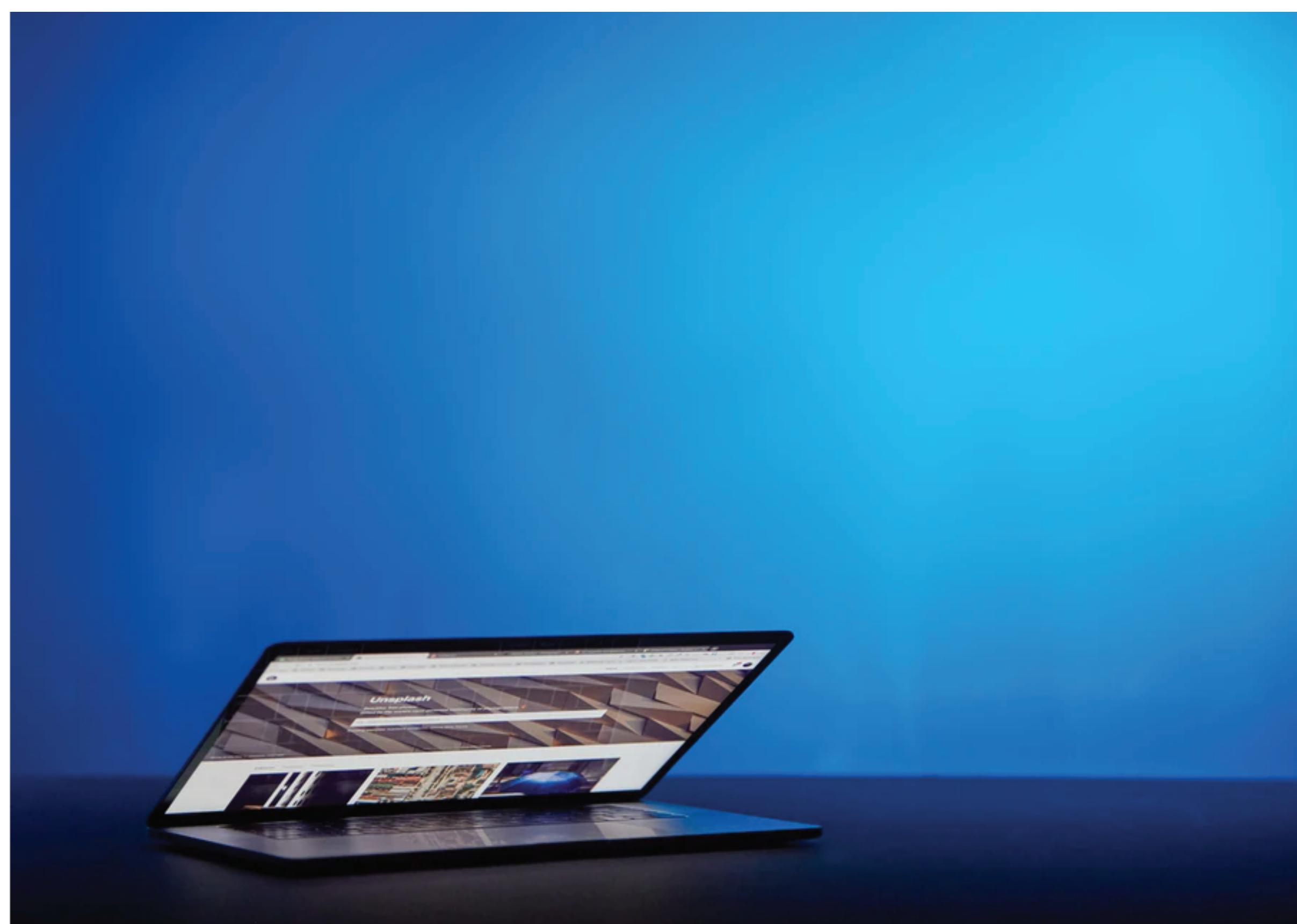


# MARIA: Aid From Afar

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## Relief Through Technology

In my freshman year at UAlbany, I participated in a research project focused on the Hurricane Maria relief effort. Though I was geographically situated in New York, I was able to utilize the Internet to stay updated on Maria and gather information to spread awareness.



Technology plays an increasingly vital role for natural disasters in both the direct aid effort and communication to and from those affected.

Over the course of the month following Maria, I aggregated news from many sources. This allowed me to reveal perspectives ranging from high-level government initiatives to popular consumer magazines. This position allowed for an unbiased view of the aftermath of Maria, as the events were unfolding.

Prior to the ease of modern communication, it would have been much harder to find a range of sources varied enough to create an objective view.

Through my experience gathering information on a rapidly-unfolding crisis, I gained invaluable skills in conducting research and selecting and verifying facts. This allowed me to write a persuasive report on the state of Puerto Rico during and after Hurricane Maria.

## Limitations

Of course, when one has only secondary sources of information to work off of, it creates a limited perspective. Nothing can replace the first-hand experience of witnessing a disaster in person. However, divulging too completely to a first-person perspective eliminates other potentially valuable pieces of information.

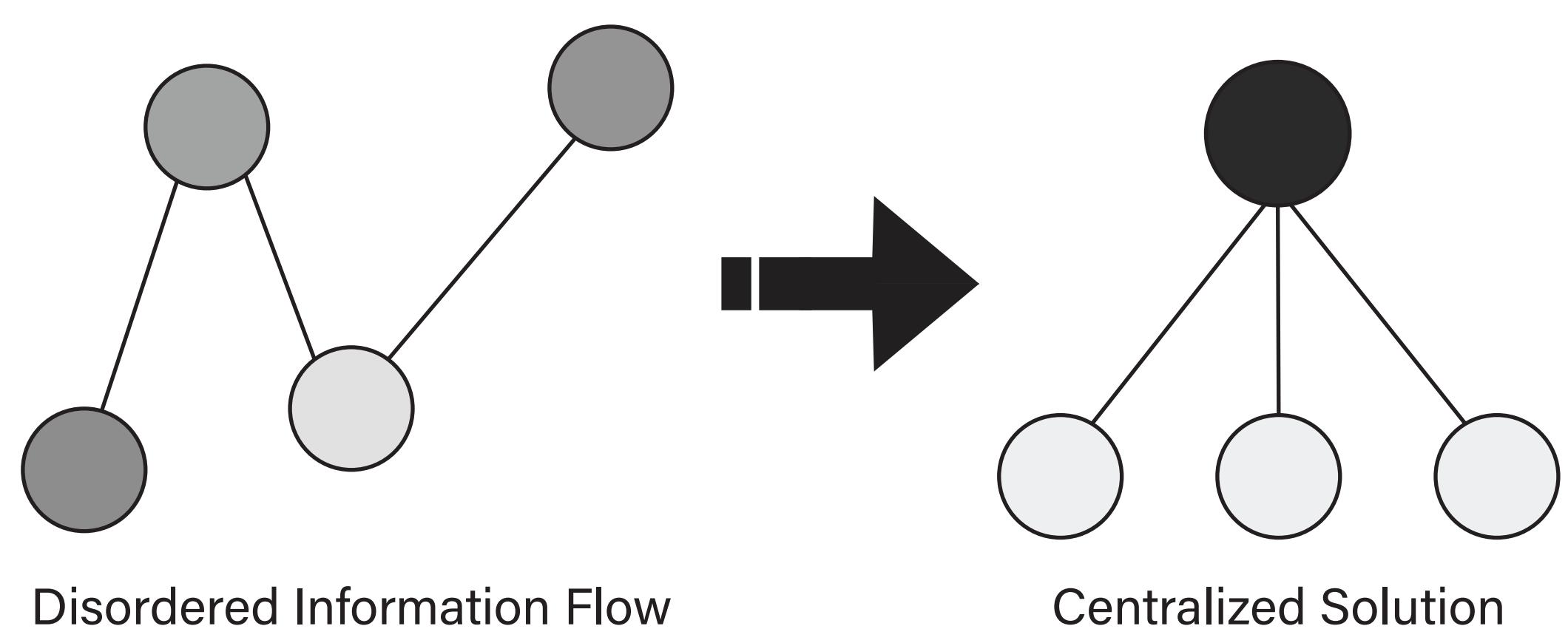


Witnessing disaster sites such as this one from Hurricane Maria would offer direct, experiential knowledge—perhaps more beneficial than web-based sources.

Image sourced from <https://www.aarp.org/aarp-foundation/our-work/disaster-relief/info-2017/hurricane-irma.html>

It's clear that the ideal solution would be to find a compromise between direct, hands-on solutions and a more abstract, condensed information source.

I imagine a system consisting of a centralized network through which aid volunteers working on the ground can quickly and efficiently report disaster conditions, specific to localized areas. Then, a more high-level team could organize this information and disseminate it to parties in need.



## In and Out of the Classroom

After the work I did online, I can say that it would be very beneficial to students to engage in a similar kind of project, especially one connected to a real-life occurrence like Maria. Professors should seek to find ways to incorporate the Internet with their class material, as it is something that is growing increasingly relevant in the second decade of the 2000s.

Work of this kind would inevitably ripple out of universities and affect fields of widely varying degrees of relatedness to the academic world. This could potentially result in huge constructive benefits to humanitarian efforts the world over.



As educational environments become increasingly integrated with technological innovations, it's important that we take full advantage of the tools now at our disposal.

Image sourced from <https://www.ccm.edu/facilities-rentals/lecture-hall/>

I want to connect with universities to help them put systems in place which will allow students of my age to use technology to aid efforts around the globe. The Internet is an invaluable resource, and I believe we use only a fraction of its potential for causes such as the humanitarian efforts in Puerto Rico. The areas that would benefit are numerous, including fundraising, raising awareness, and communication within and without organizations devoted to aid efforts. Universities are the launchpad for change in our world—it only makes sense that we start change here, in places like the University at Albany.