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Broadcast Managers Assess the Importance of a Higher Education

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FEEDBACK

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that more jobs exist in corporate television than in the broadcast industry.

In response to an open-ended question, "What specific suggestions can you give to curriculum planners to improve the effectiveness of college broadcast communication programs?" comments included:

Pay more attention to corporate communications.

More emphasis on nonbroadcast video.

Emphasize that there are more jobs available in nonbroadcast...industry needs talented individuals.

Nonbroadcast video is where you'll get the practical experience.

Internships, internships and more internships!

More opportunities exist for college grads in nonbroadcast related fields.

Be wary of all "union shops" -- make sure students truly experience the area they choose to pursue!

The majority of corporate TV managers noted that only a handful of graduates will succeed in the broadcast industry and, as one corporate television respondent stated, broadcast educators need to place "More emphasis on corporate video -- that's where the jobs are!"

Although Davis (1987) notes the disparity between broadcast television and corporate television regarding the employment of women and minorities, one wonders if it might also be possible that many broadcast students simply have not been encouraged to seek alternative careers in the corporate television industry. Many students are unaware of the opportunities that corporate television offers. Over the past nine years, I have been quite successful in helping women and minority students find internships in the corporate television industry. Several internships resulted in full-time employment after the students graduated. One of my former students was offered a position in corporate television after the company producer/director asked for my assistance in filling the job vacancy.

Realistically, not every graduate will find a job in the broadcast industry. The challenge for both broadcast educators and students is to become more flexible and aware of opportunities where talents can

be utilized. The 1987 Roper Study on Electronic Media Career Preparation criticized broadcast education programs for failing to provide practical knowledge of the real world and recommended a closer relationship between the broadcast industry and colleges and universities to provide a more realistic view of the industry. Unfortunately, as Hilt (1991) states, "The broadcast industry is not blameless in the intern problem (p. 7)." Hilt recommends that the broadcast industry find ways to give students more hands on experience instead of merely busy work.

The various studies on corporate television demonstrate the degree of practical work experience available to students. Just as the Roper Study suggested a closer relationship between the broadcast industry and higher education, perhaps the time has come for broadcast educators to take a closer look at the corporate television industry and encourage a closer relationship between the corporate communications industry and higher education.

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Broadcast Managers Assess the Importance of a Higher Education

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College students may find it difficult to predict what broadcast managers want when the latter hire newsroom employees. This problem also affects broadcast journalism faculty who teach and advise students. Much of the research in this area does not focus on the larger factors professionals use in evaluating interns, potential employees and education in general. Instead, it is more common to see vague references to writing skills, production skills, hands on training and the value of liberal arts.

It is apparent from the much discussed Roper Study on Electronic Media Career Preparation (1987) and the commentary that has followed (McCall, 1990; Dates, 1990; Renz, 1988; Prato, 1988) that industry and academia are still at odds over the issues of hands on training and other communication skills.

The professional interpretation has been confusing to educators who have always been concerned about skills. Wrote one professional, "Perhaps what's needed is the development of courses that

integrate technical training within the pure academic curriculum" (Prato, p. 10). Educators such as McCall have been quick to respond that, "Many academics have a sense that the criticisms lodged in the report simply demonstrate broadcast industry misconceptions of what a college education should philosophically (and reasonably) be expected to accomplish (1990, p. 10)" The Roper Study clearly falls short of prescribing a remedy to the perceived inadequacies of a broadcasting degree.

The present study treats broadcast employers within a mass communication context and attempts to place their responses to Roper-type questions within a broader organizational and institutional framework (McQuail, 1987). This study also will begin to establish a research agenda for academics who are interested in the ability of their graduates to find work. The broad purpose of the study is to clarify and categorize factors that professionals say are necessary in evaluating potential broadcasters.

The issue of what should be included in a broadcast major's academic program has been a topic of discussion for nearly thirty years. The fallout from the Roper Study shows that little has changed.

Education and Media Use

There is a considerable body of *conflicting* literature on what general managers and news directors say about broadcast education. "Despite continuing suspicion about the value of higher education for employment in the broadcast industry, most employers feel a college degree is a minimum requirement (Renz, p. 10)." "Professional broadcasters surveyed by the Roper organization continued to be critical of university education programs that are perceived to have too little 'hands on' training (McCall, p. 9). "Two-thirds of the nation's news directors say broadcast journalism training at universities generally gives students a head start, with solid grounding in basics (Stone, 1989, p. 58)."

Dugas (1984) suggests that from a liberal arts perspective employers should give preference to those students who are articulate.

The better we communicate, the better they will communicate with others. Then I would look for people who are knowledgeable. The less I have to teach them, the sooner they become productive staff members. Finally I would want students who have experience either from a part time job or an internship. In the fiercely competitive broadcasting marketplace, students need both a comprehensive liberal arts education and thorough technical training to succeed (p. 23).

It is common in the literature to separate professional skills, previous broadcast experience and what is generally considered to be a liberal arts college education.

The Skills Issue. A recent analysis (Hochheimer, 1991, pp. 6 - 7) outlines four broad criticisms: too little emphasis on writing; too much emphasis on machinery; lack of liberal arts substance; and favoring the needs of industry over the needs of the students.

In previous surveys of broadcast journalists, writing skills ranked above performance and production techniques (Fisher, 1978). Fisher concludes that future professionals need more than skills training -- they need the *mature understanding* which comes from a liberal arts education (p. 144). On the skills question, the industry's reaction to the Roper Study (a call for integrating technical skills with liberal arts) is not new (Parcells, 1985). It appears to be common for managers to generally believe that college graduates do not meet the employers' expectations (Funkhouser & Savage, 1987).

Media Experience. For educators, internships have been the normal way for their students to receive initial professional training (Meeske, 1988). While most professionals and educators agree that the practice could be improved (Hilt, 1991, pp. 6 - 7; Roper Study, pp. 32-33; Hyre & Owens, 1984) it remains the most common way a student can break into the field.

College *experiences* -- including media internships -- do seem to help

predict a graduate's success in the field, "...the specialized training of the universities and the provision of opportunities for role playing in the job through college media outlets and internships generally do seem to have a payoff for the student (Becker *et al.*, 1991, p. 19)." However, it is also worth noting that in quantitative models much remains unmeasured and each graduate is an individual (p. 3). Researchers have failed to probe beyond the internship experience for other college related factors.

College Education. In a recent study college related factors such as grade point average, university and program variables and college media experience were considered along with the internship (Becker *et al.*, 1991). In the end, the authors admit, success of college graduates depends mostly upon other factors that have not or cannot be measured.

Other Issues. If one treats the graduate as a product of university training to be marketed to the profession (Elmore, 1981), then there are a variety of other possible reasons a candidate would be seen as suitable for employment. For example, physical appearance and personality should not be ignored; nor should job application skills (p. 40).

Method

General managers and news directors at commercial radio and television stations in Iowa and Nebraska were selected as a purposive, judgmental non-probability sample (Babbie, 1989, p. 204) using the *Broadcasting Yearbook* (1990) as a sample frame. A total of 323 management level employees were identified for the survey mailing list. The exploratory study of broadcast managers followed survey pre-testing in Summer 1990. The Total Design Method (Dillman, 1979) for mail surveys was used. Personalized cover letters, self-administered survey booklets and business reply envelopes were sent. The first wave of surveys was mailed in October 1990. This was followed by a reminder postcard ten days later and a second mailing of the survey to non-respondents in mid November.

The overall response rate was 55.4

percent (179 surveys in tab). The response rate was above average for mail surveys for *management level populations* (Garrison & Salwen, 1989, p. 78) Response rates did not deviate dramatically by state (Iowa, 50 percent; Nebraska 60 percent)(responses rates from radio and television were equal).

The survey asked respondents questions concerning the aspects of jobs in broadcasting which they saw as important, the role of broadcast news departments, attitudes about broadcast education and various demographic information. The questions were part of a larger survey concerning the political and social views of general managers and news directors.

Results

General managers (N=96) and news directors (N=73) had different educational backgrounds. News directors were more likely to have received a college diploma (63% vs 35.8% for GMs). General managers were less likely to have continued beyond high school (12.6 % of GMs; 0% of NDs). On the other hand, relatively high percents of general managers reported attending graduate school (21% for GMs; 10.9% for NDs) and receiving graduate degrees (8.4 % for GMs; 6.8 % for NDs). General managers were more likely to have studied business or liberal arts other than mass communication, while news directors were more likely to have studied journalism or mass communication.

Evaluation of Prospective Employees

General managers and news directors were in agreement on the variables used in hiring a newsroom employee. From a list of eleven items, the two groups responded with oral communication skills, self-motivation and writing skills as most important. Next in order of importance were dedication, listening skills, news judgment, personality, previous broadcast news experience and college education. The least important of the items were the quality of the audition tape and physical appearance.

Table 1. Hiring Newsroom Employees Importance (3=Very Important)

Item	Rank	Mean Agreement
Oral Communication Skills	1	2.86
Self-motivation	2	2.84
Writing Skills	3	2.82
Dedication	4	2.77
Listening Skills	5	2.72
News Judgment	6	2.71
Personality	7	2.31
Previous broadcast news experience	8	2.20
College education	9	2.04
Quality of audition tape	10	1.99
Physical appearance	11	1.91

Table 2. Factor Analysis of Newsroom Hiring Variables -- Rotated Factor Loadings

Variable	I Capab- ilities	II Back- ground	III Traits
Self-motivation	.84	.01	.08
Writing skills	.81	.09	.09
Oral communication skills	.78	.11	-.01
Listening skills	.76	.09	.23
Dedication	.78	.08	.07
News judgment	.60	.21	.21
College education	.11	.73	-.14
Previous broadcast news experience	.13	.71	.07
Quality of the audition tape	.02	.53	.28
Physical appearance	.03	.14	.83
Personality	.38	-.05	.63
% total variance	36.9	11.8	9.7

Factor Analysis of Newsroom Hiring Variables

The eleven hiring variables were submitted to principal components factor analysis. Three variables with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 emerged, collectively accounting for 58.4 percent of the variance. The first factor, labeled *capabilities* was indexed by self-motivation, writing skills, oral communication skills, listening skills, dedication and news judgment. A second factor, labeled *Background*, was indexed by college education, previous broadcast news experience and quality of the audition tape. The third factor, labeled *Traits*, included the two remaining variables: physical appearance and personality.

Overall the factor analysis supported the *working theory* (McQuail, pp. 4 - 5) of broadcasters which treats capabilities (skills) as distinguishable from other considerations. The value of a general college education and work experience in the minds of these management-level professionals is not correlated with capabilities.

Career Preparation

The response patterns of general managers and news directors on six career preparation statements were similar. Both agreed that hands on skills, internships and a liberal arts education helped prepare broadcast students for their careers. The respondents were neutral on the need for a college degree. A rural Nebraska television news director said:

A college degree is not necessary -- especially a specific journalism degree. I much prefer a general L. A. S. [sic] background. Journalism majors tend to think they know it all when they leave college -- they do not!

Both occupation groups questioned whether students received adequate preparation and hands on training in college.

Table 3. Broadcast Career Preparation - Mean Agreement Scores (5=Strongly Agree)

<u>Item</u>	<u>General Managers</u>	<u>News Directors</u>
College should teach hands on skills	4.39	4.56
Internships prepare future broadcasters	3.96	4.03
A broad liberal arts education is valuable	3.83	4.10
A college degree is essential for a career	3.09	3.16
Colleges adequately prepare students	2.71	2.90
Students learn adequate hands on skills in college	2.43	2.59

Conclusions

The present data pose challenging questions about the possible differences between general managers and news directors concerning their views of broadcast students as future employees.

First, higher percentages of general managers in the sample saw dedication of newsroom employees as very important, while higher percentages of news directors responded that writing skills and news judgment were very important. If such differences can be replicated in future studies, can they be explained? One could argue that because news directors are "in the trenches," they would identify specific skills as necessary for a new employee to succeed.

Second, the list of newsroom hiring variables used in the present study clustered into predictable groups. Capabilities, as a factor, appears to be theoretically distinguishable from Background and Trait variables. Skills appear to be at the heart of the concerns professionals have about the college training of future broadcasters. Is it possible for educators to separate the instruction of these three factors, as is reflected in the professionals' responses?

Third, professionals in the survey favored a combination of hands on

training, internships and broad liberal arts education. However, they disagreed that students are adequately prepared and trained for a broadcast career. Professionals appear to want people who can think and people who can perform.

Should educators see this as an achievable goal, within the framework of a four year degree program? If so, are there limits to the amount of technical training a broadcasting student should receive before entering the work force? At what point should the industry pick up where educators leave off? Where does this leave liberal arts education, an area viewed as essential by the industry? University faculty, and not broadcasters, generally have the formal training to educate in the liberal arts while broadcasters, not university faculty, generally have the most up-to-date knowledge of the equipment.

While the internship would seem to be the logical bridge between a college education and a career, one small-market Iowa radio news director warned:

Some internships are a crock. Stations hire an intern sometimes just to be a gopher. What kind of a learning experience is that? Not much!

This question seems to send a challenge to the industry to take some responsibility for the lack of adequate training college students receive as broadcasting majors.

Future studies need to dig deeper into the Capabilities, Background and Trait variables that make up the nature of prospective broadcast employees, as well as the degree to which university broadcast majors fit the bill.

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Outcomes-Based Educators: A Reality Check on Hiring Broadcast Educators

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Having been a broadcaster longer than an educator, I can firmly state that many of the problems in the communication industry are based on an ironic lack of communication between

educators and industry professionals. Specifically, the problems stem from the absence of broadcasters communicating to journalism educators *their expectations* of entry-level employees. Broadcasters don't always believe broadcast educators know of the real world, unless they've been active in the profession. Conversely, broadcast journalism educators don't always take the first step and attempt to *glean* broadcaster expectations.

It is likewise surprising that communication departments of major U. S. universities, for example, give preference over seasoned broadcast professionals with decades of experience, to inexperienced instructors with new Ph. D.s and no professional media experience. Actually, administrators may be uneasy about bringing reality into the classroom. Could the harshness of the *real world* shatter the ivory towers and bring the ivy and laurels crashing to the ground?

In a recent field experiment conducted by the author, only three out of 104 U. S. college journalism departments were interested in hiring an individual with over 20 years of professional broadcast experience, two years of teaching at a major midwestern university and in A. B. D. status. This study suggested that there is an unnatural emphasis placed on the doctorate and teaching experience and a dismissal of the value of professional media experience.

Evidence suggests that professional media experience is a minimal consideration in the hiring process for new broadcast faculty members. Perhaps -- with that in mind -- we can begin to understand why broadcasters fail to communicate with educators in many cases: broadcasters may feel some professors are *out of touch* with the reality of media operations. Broadcast educators should not feel threatened: many former broadcasters, acquainted with the author who have entered academe have done so for the betterment of their departments, students, institutions and the industry -- not to intimidate their peers.

A few journalism departments, such as those at the University of Oklahoma and Kansas State University, for example, are truly reaching out and working toward implementation of

professionals in teaching roles. In fact, some of the leading institutions in the U. S. (the aforementioned institutions included) actually have instituted equivalency policies and/or employ adjunct faculty to increase involvement and input from broadcast professionals. In some cases, these schools have policies which recognize significant professional experience equal to the Ph. D. toward tenure attainment, which is commendable.

In a three year survey conducted by the author at two major midwestern universities, 88 of 95 undergraduates in broadcast curricula indicated the need for and importance of hands on learning in broadcast education. In the same study, 85 of the 95 students surveyed preferred faculty with previous media experience and a masters degree. Students seem to recognize the importance of hands on learning in such skills-oriented classes as needed in most broadcast programs.

Why then do many search committees continue the practice of emphasizing the Ph.D. over professional experience in considering new faculty for hire? Perhaps universities actively involved in broadcast education and other professionally oriented programs are not to blame. Some university administrators are required to fill a quota and employ a given number of faculty with doctoral degrees. In the broadcast profession, as in many professional programs, there are very few practitioners who hold the doctorate *and* significant professional experience. However, some of these departments and search committees are beginning to recognize the importance of incorporating into their faculties teachers with professional experience. The twenty-first century is right around the corner and mass communication continues to grow in power and influence.

The department heads of five different professional programs convened at a major midwestern university. In an analysis of their program statistics, these administrators discovered that they are granting 37 percent of the undergraduate and 52 percent of the graduate degrees offered by their own liberal arts colleges. Such figures are indicative of both the significance, popularity and importance of