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## Broadcast Manager Concern about Newsroom Career Preparation

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# Feedback

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*Feedback* serves to facilitate communication among educators and broadcast professionals, enhancing mutual appreciation of goals and demands associated with the education and employment of students in telecommunications fields.

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person can assign. The student producer can re-arrange story order by highlighting a story or stories to be moved and hitting a specific key. The producer can open a story, give it a read, and send it back to the writer if it needs changing. If editing is done the system tracks the time changes of the stories. Each on-air person can program their work desk for a word-per-minute formula so the software will time stories based on individual announcing rates.

Even with numerous writers submitting material, the software keeps track of time so the producer knows exactly how much time is left to fill or how many seconds must be edited from the cast. Writers also provide an eight character "slug" for their stories, one or two words describing the story, the type of story (cuts, interview, voicer) and then a line to indicate the corresponding cart number if needed. The system accounts for time of tapes also and computes those into the total time of the newscast.

The system allows for several things to happen in a classroom setting:

- with faculty as news director/manager, students can work under deadline pressure.
- allows producers to order news, send material back for rewrites, re-think transitions.
- allows for writers to submit their best shot and get feedback, at times quickly, if the class is set up in a newsroom lab operation.
- allows for writing teams to do collaborative work on stories, helping to check facts and spelling along the way.
- gives students the advantage of working with the latest copy and gets them into the habit of not "ripping and reading".
- allows faculty to set some real deadlines beyond "next class meeting" and have students submit work, say "one hour after a speech" or "two hours after a meeting ends" with material being sent to the faculty computer.
- it gets students involved in current events and tracking various stories day-to-day and week-to-week since they are working with AP copy on a regular basis.
- it allows finished scripts to be sent directly to the TV studio where

they appears on the teleprompter in "BIG" letters - editorial changes can be made in the studio if needed during a newscast.

- it creates a newsroom atmosphere where people are working on stories, going through the AP Search desk for additional information on stories/events, pulling up background information on a story, and compiling a newscast as a team using current information that is not being taken from a newspaper.

The system has made a difference in the way students handle writing assignments and the way they handle time pressures. It allows faculty to emphasize the need for rewrites, for building a newscast properly, for editing and proofing copy before it is set to be read on-air and for understanding the value of teamwork. Students learn the pressures of an assignment editor, a writer, a reporter and a producer. All four titles get involved in the final project.

## **Newsroom Careers Broadcast Manager Concern about Newsroom Career Preparation**

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There is a continuing need to better understand the needs and wants of broadcast general managers and news directors when they hire newsroom employees (Basow & Byrne, 1993; Parcells, 1985). In the Winter 1993 issue of *Feedback*, a two-state survey found that "higher percentages of broadcast general managers saw dedication of newsroom employees as very important, while higher percentages of news directors responded that writing skills and news judgment were very important" (Hilt & Lipschultz, p. 18).

The present study expanded the research from the two-state census to a national sample. The purpose of this

study is to compare responses from general managers and news directors concerning newsroom hiring variables. In particular, the focus of the present study is on what educators can do in assisting the development of future broadcasters.

There are a number of academic, professional and personal variables that may be associated with the transition from college student to broadcast journalist. Based on the previous literature review, this study develops and examines one set of variables broadcast managers consider when hiring a newsroom employee. We were interested in such variables as skills (Hochheimer, 1991; Fisher, 1978), media experience and college education (Becker, Kosicki, Engleman, & Viswanath, 1991).

### **Method**

General managers and news directors at commercial radio and television stations across the United States were selected as a "stratified" random sample (Babbie, 1992, pp. 215-217) using the 1992 *Broadcasting & Cable Market Place*. In the first stage, the 209 television markets and 262 radio markets were each divided into four groups based on size to approximate major, large, medium and small markets (television: 1-52, 53-104, 105-156, 157-209; radio: 1-65, 66-130, 131-196, 197-262). Then, 26 markets were randomly selected within each of these subgroups, based on budgetary limitations. In the second stage, individual radio and television general managers were randomly selected to represent each of the markets. The sample represented roughly equal numbers of general managers and news directors for comparative purposes.

A total of 416 broadcast general managers and news directors were identified for the survey mailing list. The survey was self-administered. The Total Design Method for mail surveys was used (Dillman, 1979). Personalized cover-letters, survey booklets and business reply envelopes were sent. The first wave of surveys was mailed in October 1992. This was followed by a second mailing of the survey to non-respondents in early November. A third wave of surveys was mailed to non-respondents in early December.

**Table 1. Hiring Newsroom Employees**

"Do you agree or disagree that the following items are important when a station hires a newsroom employee?"

Ranked items		Mean	N	Standard Deviation	t Value	Significance
Communication skills (4.75)*	GM	4.72	67	0.49	-0.41	n.s.
	ND	4.75	81	0.58		
Self-motivation (4.61)	GM	4.63	67	0.49	0.23	n.s.
	ND	4.61	81	0.65		
Dedication (4.50)	GM	4.52	66	0.59	0.43	n.s.
	ND	4.47	81	0.69		
News judgment (4.46)	GM	4.40	67	0.68	-0.85	n.s.
	ND	4.50	80	0.69		
On-air presence (4.24)	GM	4.27	67	0.5	0.32	n.s.
	ND	4.24	81	0.68		
Personality (4.09)	GM	4.08	67	0.64	0.00	n.s.
	ND	4.07	81	0.70		
Voice quality (3.94)	GM	4.0	67	0.62	0.88	n.s.
	ND	3.91	81	0.76		
Physical appearance (3.68)	GM	3.74	66	0.66	0.91	n.s.
	ND	3.60	81	0.8		
Broadcast news experience (3.68)	GM	3.58	67	0.82	-1.25	n.s.
	ND	3.7	81	0.94		
Audition tape quality (3.66)	GM	3.66	67	0.79	-0.07	n.s.
	ND	3.67	81	0.89		
College degree (3.51)	GM	3.51	67	0.91	0.08	n.s.
	ND	3.4	81	1.09		
College major (2.83)	GM	2.97	67	0.59	1.66	n.s.
	ND	2.73	81	0.92		

\* These represent the overall mean for general managers and news directors combined.

The overall response rate was 36.3 percent (N=151), "typical" (20-40 percent) for mail surveys (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994, p. 124). Wimmer and Dominick point out that low response rates raise reliability issues. While the response rate in this study does limit generalizability, the research is exploratory, and as such, is designed to focus future examinations.

#### **Educational Backgrounds of Respondents**

There were few descriptive differences between general managers

and news directors in the sample concerning their educational backgrounds.

All but two news director respondents reported formal education beyond high school, and only two general managers (3 percent) had not continued beyond high school. News directors appeared to be slightly more likely to have received a college diploma (48.1 percent versus 44.9 percent for GMs). However, it appeared that a higher percentage of general managers reported attending graduate school (15.9 percent versus

12.7 percent). General managers appeared more likely (60 percent) to have studied business or liberal arts (other than mass communication), while news directors appeared more likely (77.2 percent) 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 twelve items drawn from the literature review, the two groups responded that

communication skills, self-motivation, dedication and news judgment were most important. Next, in order of importance, on-air presence, personality, voice quality, physical appearance, broadcast news experience and audition tape quality.

The least important items were college degree and college major.

There were no statistically significant differences between general managers and news directors on the twelve newsroom hiring variables.

### Interpretations and Conclusions

It may be that on the twelve variables used in this study to measure newsroom employee hiring, general managers and news directors respond more as broadcasters. In broadcasting, the most important skill is the ability to communicate. It is just as important for the broadcast journalist as it is for the business-oriented manager. Likewise, skills such as self-motivation and dedication have always been highly valued in all aspects of the field, whether the concern is good journalism or station profitability.

There are limitations in the present study. As noted earlier, the low response rate suggests the need for replication of the findings. Further, this exploration scratches the surface of understanding the hiring process at broadcast news operations.

However, given the limitations of the present study, the findings help focus the importance broadcast managers place on some hiring variables.

Future research should consider if there is a pattern of responses. For example, is there a relationship between self-motivation and dedication? How do on-air presence, physical appearance and voice quality relate, if at all?

This research falls short of explaining the complex hiring decisions faced by broadcast general managers and news directors. For example, a news director hiring an entry-level news reporter might have two qualified candidates -- one with previous news experience, and the other with stronger communication skills. If all the other variables are equal, how does the news director decide? Would each news director make the same decision?

It seems clear that controlling for all the variables that might be important in a particular hiring situation may be impossible. For example, a news director wanting to "balance" or "complement" existing staff would have to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of current employees. Or, a news director who places emphasis on an audition tape may not be able to articulate all of the reasons she or he "likes" an applicant.

While students and faculty might well want to predict what attributes broadcast managers want in the hiring of newsroom employees, there can be no guarantees. By following the generalizations of research on broadcast news career preparation, the student, at best, earns the opportunity to be competitive for job openings. This does not mean the student will be hired.

### Notes

1. Results from the previous two-state study in the Winter 1993 issue of *Feedback* suggested the possibility that these variables cluster into three theoretical factors. These might roughly be called "on-air traits," "off-air capabilities," and "higher education." However, attempts to produce factor scores yielded weak loadings which may be difficult to replicate.

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## Gifted 6th Graders & TV

# What Gifted Sixth-Graders Don't Know About Television

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There is little doubt that children spend vast amounts of time watching television and that they are among the most susceptible audiences to television's influences. Children have been found to spend more time with television than with any other activity out of school (Timmer, Eccles, & O'Brien, 1985). Children and teens have spent more time in front of a television than in classroom instruction by the time of high school graduation (Fosarelli, 1986). Roughly 95 percent of the time children view television is spent watching programs not strictly intended for child audiences (Comstock & Paik, 1991). The negative effects of television viewing in terms of aggressiveness, race/gender stereotyping, product consumption, perceived reality, and socialization have been well documented in hundreds of studies over the past 25 years. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the negative effects of television viewing can be mitigated by the degree to which children understand the television medium.

Several critical television viewing skills curricula have been developed and evaluated in recent years (Adams & Hamm, 1987; Dorr, Graves, &