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Employer and Training Needs: Report 11 Media Production

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Report Number Eleven



MEDIA PRODUCTION

EMPLOYER AND TRAINING NEEDS

PREPARED FOR METROPOLITAN TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Center for Applied Urban Research

university of
nebraska 
at omaha 

MEDIA PRODUCTION

by

Carole M. Davis

MEDIA PRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the employer and training needs in the metropolitan Omaha area in the field of media production with the main focus on the field of film production.

Study Design and Execution

To determine the target population, an exploratory study of the field of film production was conducted. A CAUR researcher interviewed individuals working in this field. From this initial investigation, the listings under four headings in the telephone Omaha metropolitan directory were determined to be the sampling frames. These headings were "Motion Picture Producers and Studios," "Advertising Agencies," "Television Networks," and "School Systems."

A sampling was done of local businesses that were identified as employers of media production specialists. Listings under "Advertising Agencies" were grouped and sampled according to relevant stratification variables. All listings under each of the other headings were included in the sample.

A survey instrument conducted for use in previous studies of employer and training needs was adapted for use in this study. The findings are summarized here.

Findings of the Study

Film Production as a Job Category

Film production as defined by employers involved several categories of work and included such areas as: film animation, still photography, slide show production, and motion-picture photography. Although the exact techniques varied among categories, basic film theory and technology were felt to be applicable to all.

Number of Employees

Motion picture producers and studios and the television networks are the primary employers of persons working in the field of film production in Omaha, Nebraska. The number of individuals employed by motion picture producers and studios varied from five full-time at one studio to two full-time at two others. Several employed part-time workers. Some hired free-lance workers on occasion.

Television networks generally combine film production jobs with other jobs. For example, one television network said they had twelve photographers who shot both film and video tape. One network had 14 people employed in video and only one part-time photographer working in 35mm film. Another network said that four employers each spent only about 15 percent of their time shooting film. Television networks are phasing out most film production and have gone to remote video. Video is more cost efficient and offers more production flexibility. For example, ten minutes of film costs \$100 whereas 20 minutes of video costs \$12 and is reusable.

Advertising agencies very seldom do their own film production because equipment is too expensive. They instead hire a camera crew from one of the motion picture producers or studios.

The film crew does the actual production based on an idea created by the advertising agency in response to a client need. The advertising agency directs and supervises the project.

Neither the school systems nor larger corporate firms in Omaha employ individuals in the field of film production to any great extent. The Omaha Public Schools hire one full-time photographer who works mostly with slides or super 8 film. District 66 film production needs are generally met by their own staff of "certified" teachers who are trained to work in the media areas. Larger firms handle their film production needs in various ways. For example, one company, Northern Natural Gas, contracts with an advertising agency. Mutual of Omaha has one person who spends less than 5 percent of his time putting together "Management Communication" or informational tapes. Another firm, Leo Daly, hires a motion picture studio to do their complicated projects. Their own communication department handles the slide shows when required, but it has been nearly three years since they have put one together. Peter Kiewit and Co. employs one individual who does a few slides for educational purposes. Most training

films are bought or rented. If a film is made of a project, it is done by the "owner" of a completed job; for example, a utilities company or the State Highway Department.

New Jobs in this Category

Almost all of the individuals contacted said they had no plans to create any new jobs in the field of film production in the next three years. A few said they didn't know but probably would not be creating new jobs. Most people surveyed said that the need for employees in this job category would either decrease or remain about the same.

The trend toward the use of video tape in television has contributed to the decline in the need for film production workers. Rising cost of film makes video taping more feasible in most areas of media production. One advertising agency owner said, "Clients are cutting back in this area because of the economy. Clients can achieve the same exposure with other media for less money."

One interviewee stated that the number of trained applicants was about equal to the number of available jobs. The majority of these interviewed said, however, that the number of trained people exceeds the number of available jobs. For example, an interviewee from a television network said that if a job opening is advertised widely it can bring from 50 to 100 applications. Locally, there would be a lot fewer applicants. An ad for a camera operator/floor manager placed by Channel 3 brought in 15 applications. All applicants had four-year degrees, mostly in broadcasting. Interviewees disagreed most widely about just how "qualified" applicants were. Several felt applicants lacked knowledge about what is used in the "real world."

Skills and Knowledge

Knowledge of the technical aspects of photography and editing were most frequently mentioned as requirements to work in the field of film production. Skill in the use of lighting and sound techniques were also frequently mentioned. Layout, graphics, and drafting skills were felt to be especially important by those people who worked mostly with slides and stills. Several interviewees said creativity, or the ability to use equipment and techniques in an artistic and creative manner, was important.

Other skills or knowledge areas mentioned were ability to work with clients, the ability to write, and an understanding of movement. One interviewee mentioned physical stamina as an important requirement for those working on film crews. Cameras are hand-held and must be held steady for live shots.

Most interviewees agreed that experience was the ingredient most often lacking in job applicants. One interviewee commented, "Universities do not supply students with what is relevant for the real world. The course of study is too theoretical and not practical so the actual work experience received by students is very shallow."

Experience was stressed as being important to applicants in securing a job. Two interviewees said they would not hire someone without experience. Another said, "After we hire someone we have to give them one to two years of on-the-job training before they can realistically hold down the job."

The majority said creativity was also often lacking in job applicants. Most programs or courses of study were geared toward technical aspects of the job and did not stress how to look at and put things together creatively.

Ability to organize the job to get the job done efficiently, a sense of deadline and discipline, and the understanding that film production is hard work were other ingredients sometimes lacking in job applicants.

When asked what type of education/training was appropriate for a job in film production, the majority stated that a four-year program at a college or university would be best. Two said a one-year program at a technical community college would be the best preparation, and one person said a two-year program would be best. All agreed that these courses should be combined with either on-the-job training or an apprenticeship program.

The most frequently mentioned courses that should be included in an educational program for film production workers were: photography and film technology, editing, lighting and composition, sound technology, movie production, directing, and studio production. Several interviewees who had experience with applicants with four-year degrees from local universities said students should be receiving a broader, more well-rounded education to include courses in business, public relations, advertising, acting, and writing. Interviewees highly recommended that courses in video-taping be offered since it is rapidly replacing the use of film.

Several interviewees suggested that students be required to do two or three shooting sessions weekly with assignments getting tougher as courses progress in order to acquire the experience so crucial to employment.

Salary Scales

Salaries were difficult to determine in this area because jobs in film production are generally combined with some other job. Interviewees estimated that beginning salaries varied from minimum wage to \$5.00 an hour. Yearly, beginning salaries varied from \$9,000 to \$15,000. Maximum yearly salaries were thought to range from \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year. One interviewee said that competition is very keen but if you're good at what you do the sky's the limit for salary. Another interviewee said, "People really want to get into this area so will work for low wages in the beginning."

Suggestions for a Metro Tech Program

Interviewees almost unanimously agreed that it would not be worth while for Metro Tech to establish a program of study in the field of film production. Several reasons were cited by interviewees:

- 1) Job opportunities are very limited in this area.
- 2) Far too many students with four-year degrees in communications, broadcasting, journalism, or telecommunications are already looking for jobs. One interviewee said throughout the country that about 70,000 students were competing for about 7,000 openings.
- 3) A technical college with a maximum two-year program could not provide sufficient training. There are so many people with four-year degrees that employers will hire them before they would hire someone with less training or fewer qualifications.
- 4) Most film production is being phased out and replaced with remote video.
- 5) Equipment is expensive and it changes often.

Several interviewees suggested that people might be interested in adult education courses in this area to be taken for fun or as a hobby.

Other Suggestions

Although film production was not seen as a necessary course for Metro Tech to offer, several interviewees highly recommended that one in the maintenance of electronic equipment be developed. A production manager at a local T.V. station said, "There is a real need to look at electronics as it relates to T.V. and radio. Skilled engineers to repair equipment and keep it running are badly needed."

Several other interviewees also said there is high demand for technical people trained in electronics to repair T.V. cameras and other equipment.

Summary and Conclusions

The need for employees in the field of film production in the Omaha metropolitan area will either decrease or remain about the same. The use of video tape is replacing the need for more film production workers because rising cost of film has made video taping much more cost efficient. Further, this type of job is generally combined with other jobs so film production workers spend only a small percent of their time shooting film.

Interviewees generally agreed that the number of trained people exceeds the number of available jobs. The media field is over-saturated with people who have four-year degrees in communications, broadcasting, journalism or telecommunications, eliminating the need for courses of study at the one- or two-year level.

Some of the interviewees recommended, however, that Metro Tech develop a course on the maintenance of the electronic equipment used by the radio and television industries. They said the real demand was for skilled engineers to repair the equipment and keep it running.