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Erica L. Hardy
Western Kentucky University

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Getting a Job: How Effective are Broadcast Internships?

A Thesis for the Honors Program

Erica L. Hardy

Western Kentucky University

Spring 2007

Approved by

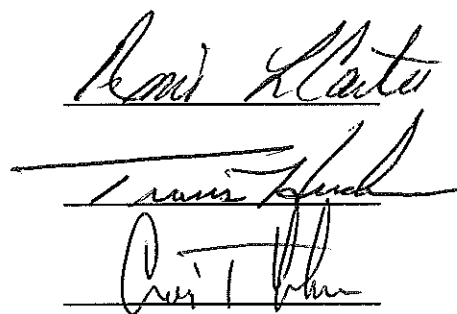

The image shows three handwritten signatures, each written over a horizontal line. The top signature is 'David Carter', the middle one is 'Travis Smith', and the bottom one is 'Chris T. [unclear]'. The signatures are in cursive and appear to be in black ink.

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Abstract

The job market today in the broadcasting industry is highly competitive. Students with degrees and field experience may still be left jobless. It is believed throughout the industry that an internship is mandatory to get into the business. I agree. But, some students who are doing internships and finishing college are not getting jobs. This means students are reevaluating their life decisions and transferring to non-related fields to move on in life.

In my research, I examined the journals of 37 Western Kentucky University interning during the summer of 2006. I evaluated their experiences based on the journal they turned in to receive credit for the internship. I also examined the data regarding the broadcasting graduates of 2007 and how many of them have jobs when they graduate. I inspected how stations put their interns to use and where students in broadcasting can improve to succeed in their chosen field. Internships are a valuable experience. They allow students to put their best foot forward, thus benefiting the station and the student.

Introduction: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly of Broadcast Internships

The expectations of an intern from an employer vary from station to station. Students need to know that there are endless opportunities for a successful internship. Nearly all of the radio-television departments polled in a recent nationwide survey stated they offer a professional internship program (Meeske 75). The power of an internship can make or break ones desire to pursue a career in that particular field. Getting to see what demands the business holds and evaluating your ability in that given situation are crucial to making a career decision. According to the journal, "Broadcast Newsroom Hiring and Career Preparation", the programs should offer an opportunity to grow in the professional environment, while supplementing what has been learned in the classroom (Hilt, Lipschultz 36). Weaver and Siegel gave the analogy, "like a doctor completing a residency in medicine, an intern is working as an apprentice for a television show, station, or newsroom in exchange for college or high school credit"(5). This apprenticeship creates great benefits to an interns work ability and personal maturity. According to Crosby, students typically return from the experience more mature, focused, and confident, all of which make them greater assets to potential employers upon graduation.

An important thing to remember when facing the challenge of an internship is that ultimately the intern chooses how far they can grow as a broadcaster. The intern decides their willingness to learn and eagerness to become better. I read the article, "New Approaches for Teaching Female Students in Broadcasting". This source was a little outdated, but some of the principles the author talked about relate to anyone, male or female, wishing to succeed in broadcasting. Crosby broke down the subjects into two groups: constructivists and proceduralists. Crosby defined constructivists as "those who move beyond systems by putting those systems to their own service" (Crosby 36). This is what successful people in general should be. According to Crosby, constructivists would be more likely to see the future as a conquest than proceduralists who are less positive about their own intrinsic abilities to influence the workplace, or to define their careers on their own terms (Crosby 40-41). The message that is delivered goes beyond gender. It states that creating ones own opportunities can give internal and workplace satisfaction.

Many students need to know how to get the most out of their internship experience. There are some do's and don'ts that the article, "Internships: How to get Your Foot in the Door and Stay There" offers to students. Keeping a positive attitude is crucial for employers to see. They want to work with people who are enthusiastic and upbeat with regards to their station. Being on time, if not early,

is another way to show they are thankful for the opportunity. Prioritizing and completing assignments shows employers that they know how to manage time and get things done on a deadline. Many teachers tell students this growing up and it relates to any career field, thinking outside of the box. Being able to create new ideas and make suggestions shows initiative. People who voice their opinion, seek out additional responsibilities, and want to improve can excel in broadcasting quickly (CareerBuilder.com Staff 2).

Most don'ts of an internship are common knowledge. No one wants to work with people who think they know it all. That is a quick warning sign of inability to improve. Also, do not use email, the Internet, the copier, or the phone for personal use. Along with disrespect, this shows an inability to stay focused on the job. Don't hunt for jobs while interning. Another important 'don't' is not getting caught up in 'water cooler gossip'. Like the saying goes, "you never know who is listening and if you are talking about someone that means someone is probably talking about you." Lastly, don't dress down. According to the article, wearing wrinkled clothes or 'club wear' shows that the intern feels casual about the opportunity (2).

There are positives and negatives in any experience, and interning is no different. Sometimes interns have to run tapes or proofread and print scripts. These things may seem tedious but they are a crucial part of a good newscast,

and interns must be willing to work their way up. A big part of how effective their internship will be is researching the station's requirements. A student can be blinded by the fact that they found an internship in New York with a big network, the pinnacle of broadcasting. What they do not understand is that these places run efficiently with so many people. In a study by Meeske, faculty members identified the most frequent problem in internships is the variation of the quality (77). So, do research. It is even recommended by many journalism educators that internships take place in smaller markets. These are where more one on one instruction is given, and there are more opportunities to do original work.

The pros and the cons of interning are laid out. Students' personal experiences vary. The most detailed and valuable part of my research came from talking with my peers and reading the journals of the students who interned in the summer of 2006. This journal was part of the curriculum requirement of the three-hour credit they received for interning. These journals described their specific experience and gave their overall opinion and evaluation of the effectiveness of broadcast internships.

Many internships are positive, and students really enjoy them. They were used in a positive manor. The students learned, and the experience helped guide

them to what they want to do as a professional. Here are some of the stories about their internship.

One of my classmates and close friend, Evan Daniels, did his internship at WLKY-TV. He liked it and respects Mr. Cowgill very much. He learned a lot and loved his experience. But during his senior year, he found something very similar to sports broadcasting he wanted to do even more. He decided not to go into television, but instead scout high school basketball prospects for Scout.com, an Internet scouting service. He gets to travel, watch sports, evaluate 'big-time' prospects, and write about it. He fulfilled his dream of working with sports, just through a different type of medium, the Internet.

My first day at WLKY was overwhelming. Sports director, Fred Cowgill, was my mentor and sat me down first thing and talked about his expectations. For him, punctuality was crucial. Being to work on time and even early makes the day run more smoothly. Cowgill's philosophy on his newscasts was that they would be done as soon as possible, up to two and three hours before the actual show. He defended this because there will sometimes be breaking news and if your show is already put together you can know what is top priority and what can be dumped and not be frazzled because you are already prepared. He gave me a list of things to do to start my day. They included reading the local newspaper and checking nearly ten websites that report stories that are related to

that market. From there I was taught tape-to-tape editing and how to log all the pieces we did onto paper. This is called archiving, so at any point in time when you need footage of something you can revert to the log and see exactly what date, what tape, and the time code of the piece.

Cowgill sent me out into the field that night with reporter, Keith Norton. We drove nearly 150 miles that day to shoot and interview who we needed. I learned how to operate a camera and edit highlights when I returned to the studio. As the summer went on, I began to edit whole shows, conduct interviews myself, and even shoot some sporting events. As an intern I got to interview: Rick Pitino, the University of Louisville men's basketball coach, Bobby Petrino, former U of L men's football coach, Roger Clemens a soon to be hall of fame Major League baseball pitcher, and many other prominent sports figures. I learned to operate technological tools that are necessities in the newsroom. My intern experience as a whole was very positive and worthwhile. I was taught, mentored, and became a better broadcaster. From the experience, I made contacts that will hopefully help me get a job.

Another intern who had a wonderful experience was McKenzie York. She described WAVE-3 as a very encouraging environment. She went out into the field, covered breaking news, stayed in the newsroom, and mastered mechanics. She felt like she really was getting a taste of what the business was going to be

about in her future, and she loved it. She said reporters and producers gave her more self-confidence and pushed her to apply to bigger markets because she was that good. One of the most important things York took away from her experience was not to settle for less than she was capable. This is proof that internships can turn into job opportunities. When York graduates, she will begin her career as a producer at WAVE-3.

Though the good outweighed the bad significantly, there were a couple of students who felt they were not used to their full potential as interns. They were frustrated at their stations. Surprisingly though, for the most part, they all still wanted to pursue broadcasting. They talked about the negatives of their internship and how they wanted to move on and better themselves. Here are their stories.

Kevin Amundson did his internship in Madison, Wisconsin at the NBC affiliate. He called his experience 'mostly bad.' After just two weeks there, an AVID computer was broken, not by him, but it was blamed on 'the intern,' and he lost his computer privileges for the rest of the summer. He said he was treated like he knew nothing and was often just told to carry photographer's things because 'an intern should make real employee's lives easier.' No one wanted to take him on assignment, and reporters would just leave him. It made him feel very awkward. He also said he was treated differently than the female

intern, whom in his words was attractive. He did not think that was fair. Also, Amundson said he felt like his only importance at the station was logging tapes. This can be a very boring task. Amundson did not let this deter him from making a tape in his time there, and he still wants to become a broadcaster.

One student did her internship at Insight Communications as a production assistant. She said overall her experience was good, but there were some things that she did not like. She and their boss seemed to have had a lot of communication problems. Their ideas clashed, and it made teamwork difficult. She also felt that there were many times where she wasn't instructed what to do so she would just sit there, too intimidated to ask. Once she was late due to a car breakdown, and the boss only said you should have been here at nine not nine thirty. The intern described the incident as unforeseen and was perturbed that the boss could not understand.

The consensus of the students having such a positive experience indicates that internships are crucial to learning the reality of the business. They give students a chance to network as well as provide them the insight necessary to choose a career field. Some of these students decided not to go into television. They found they loved radio. That is just one example; others chose sales, public relations or print journalism. The most important thing is that they were allowed

to make a more informed life decision. Some of the specific things students said can give better insight into the value of their internship.

“When they realized I had this knowledge coming in, they got more comfortable with me and allowed me to try new things. Overall, I felt that I was as prepared (from classroom knowledge) as I could be coming into this internship, but the experience I received cannot be recreated during my time at Western.” –Bryan Hash, WHAS-11

“The whole summer was very hands-on and busy, but was somehow made into a very laid back working environment. It exceeded my expectations and more, I feel prepared to take on the ‘real world’ when I graduate.” –Matt Whitley, NFL Films

“I had to overcome many feeling of insecurity in the beginning to make it to the point where I actually became part of the team.” –Stephanie Young, Clear Channel Radio

“The first day of my internship was completely intimidating and the last day was one of the hardest I’ve had in a long time. I learned that I loved news. I loved the people I got to work with and the fun I had at the station while I was there. Everyday I got do something new. I was able to be the first on a scene at a wildfire, see a police chase first hand, and write under pressure.” –Rae Chelle Davis, KESQ

“The work that I did over the course of my internship helped me learn so much about post production. No matter what area I may end up working in, this internship has helped me discover that I am heading in the right direction.” –John Hitch, CMT

The Job Market

The job market is extremely competitive and not very promising. The first thing most aspiring journalists learn in college is the miniscule salary they should anticipate. Since the turn of the century, the Annual Surveys of

Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates had shown a decline in the market until 2005. 2005 was the first year in six years that the market had not gotten worse. This isn't to say it is improving (Speckman 10).

Lee Becker, the Director of the Cox Center for International Mass Communication Training and Research at the University of Georgia, said, "The market seems to have bottomed out and should slowly starting moving back in a more positive direction" (Speckman 10). More jobs becoming available are accredited to increased turnover, according to Becker. Bob Priddy, Missouri News Director, said, "There won't be a huge improvement in salaries" (Speckman 12). According to Becker, most recent graduates should expect salaries in the teens (Speckman 10). Priddy notably added, "The more professional experience you've gained while in college, the more attractive you're going to be as a candidate for a job" (Speckman 10). According to the article, students need to stay flexible about location and accept lower salaries at first.

A sad reality to the job market is that it is not what you know, but who you know that gets you a job. This is echoed in Speckman's article, "Someone knew someone who knew him and the student was offered the job before the formal interview" (Speckman 12). Though this may deter some students from the market, Speckman gives great advice. It is a buyer's market, students don't

need to be the best at one thing, rather be proficient in many newsroom needs. This tells employers that you are multi-talented and can contribute to the station in more than one way. "It's not good enough to do one thing" (Speckman 12).

There is no promise of a job in journalism to those with a degree or an internship. With the job market still trying to recover from a huge decline, the market does not look outstanding for 2007 graduates either. This is the reason journalists must be perseverant, multi-talented, and have a passion for the job that outweighs their passion for money.

Conclusion

Out of 37 students, only two spent a significant amount of their paper talking about the negatives more than the positives. Both of these students still wanted to go into broadcasting and were grateful for the experience. The reasons for their dissatisfaction were: being left with nothing to do, having a difficult time effectively communicating with their superiors, and gaining no new skills.

Thirty-five student interns enjoyed their experience. There were three main positive components of the internship that most of the students agreed. The first was that they were given the ability to do hands on, real life work. Second, the students felt that the people and the environment of the station were

willing to help the student become better. Finally, students were happy that they got to work in the studio with up to date broadcasting equipment.

When it comes to what really matters though, it is employment. In the spring of 2007, 28 students will graduate from the School of Journalism and Broadcasting with a concentration in broadcast news. Of those, only six currently have a job lined up, and one has decided to move on to graduate school. That is only 21 percent. This is coming from a school that is consistently ranked in the top five in the country for its broadcasting program. This statistic shows no improvement in the broadcasting job market.

The conclusion I have come to after book and journal research, plus, the most important thing, personal experiences from myself and my peers is that you must do a broadcast internship to have a chance at getting into the broadcasting business. Though everyone who has done one might not get a job or does not have one yet, without it you are left behind. Internships offer invaluable hands on field experience, plus, as discussed earlier, enable you to network yourself, which is a priceless commodity.

My Perspective

For the majority, my perspective comes directly from my experience. I started t-ball at age four, basketball a year later and volleyball and golf soon followed. There was not a sport that I did not attempt to play during childhood;

my father would not have had it any other way. Once I realized that I was a little better than average and that volleyball could put me through college, I knew that nothing else – besides my parents – had influenced and shaped my life as much as sports.

Athletes were role models to me. I cheered wildly at the television for Mia Hamm, Lisa Leslie, and the magnificent seven U.S. gymnastics team during the 1996 Atlanta Olympic games. I watched Michael Jordan and Fred Couples. I knew every statistic about any University of Louisville athletic team and still do. Sports aroused my emotions unlike anything else. Most people would define me by my intense and competitive spirit, and that makes me proud. I can attribute my two greatest attributes to sports.

It has been my dream since the tenth grade to be a sports broadcaster. I knew then my passion was sports, and my ultimate goal would be to report about all aspects of sport to the nation through television. I guess it comes with the evolution of technology coming a little before my generation, but I never was too much into radio. I deemed it as an old and outdated way to get the news.

I believe that putting a face to the newscast can relay emotions across a nation. I also believe that there are some television personalities that clash with what I personally like, which I am pretty sure is the way everyone else in America feels. The power of having a face tell you what is happening in your

world has certainly been around for a long time. What is funny is that with the evolution of the Internet, many people are going back to the days of newspaper- no voice, no face, just words.

In our society, the main priority is ones self. We try to master how to get exactly what we need in the shortest amount of time as possible. It is no wonder television budgets continue to get cut back every year, people are finding new alternatives and the market I want to retire in is losing some of its almighty power of the days of old. The amazing power of the Internet will definitely have an impact on my success in the sports broadcasting industry.

I am very confident that I will succeed in whatever I choose to do. I believe that happiness is a choice and that you choose how you feel everyday. Sports broadcasting is my dream, and I have done my internship, shadowed stations, and put together a resume tape of the best I have to offer. The scary thing now is the wait; the wait to see if someone wants to take a chance on me to see if I can take their station to a new level and fulfill my dreams at the same time.

My suggestions to those getting into college and having the same goal as me, to be a sports broadcaster, would be three things. You must start early. I interned the summer before my senior year. I would recommend at least shadowing a station your freshman year. Plus, get involved in what your

campus has to offer. Volunteer to do cameras or the teleprompter, hang around the newsroom and observe others more experienced than you work by themselves and as a team. Start early and put yourself out there, the newsroom can be a scary place and everyone will be intimidated at some point, but it will only make your skin thicker and you more valuable. Be the one people turn to when they have a question.

Secondly, intern in more than one field. Do not limit yourself to the job you always wished you could do. If I could do things differently, I would have interned in radio, sales and even public relations. Limiting yourself essentially makes you one-dimensional. The term convergence has recently reemerged in the media. Convergence is defined as the process of coming together or uniting in a common interest or focus (Dominick 22). This term can be applied to students in broadcasting because personal convergence is making yourself capable of more than one thing. It is parallel to corporate convergence. Companies like Insight use to offer just cable television. Now, Insight offers cable, Internet, and phone lines. They can give their customer more all from the same common place. News directors essentially search to buy 'a product,' potential employee, that can offer them more than one broadcasting skill.

Finally, immerse yourself in producing, writing and even directing. Who knows, you might like it. If there is one thing you have to understand and buy

into it is this; writing is the most crucial element to becoming a top-class journalist. Read the newspaper and not just the sports or the features. Keep up with current events or you will be left behind. Pick a minor that will give you a leg up on others, it can be your own beat as a reporter. Some people choose history, or political science, even health; all of these are great options. Do not be intimidated by the clout of the business. With a broadcast internship and a relentless will to succeed, it can be done.

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