

# PREPARING FOR THE JOB MARKET

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Getting your students and interns ready for the job market is one of the most important things you will do for them and it will have the long-lasting effects. How to get a job and how to prepare for the real world of the journalism job market today, though, is often overlooked. Yet if you make it a part of your upper-class journalism students' regular coursework you will not only be doing them a great service, you will develop a reputation in the journalism community – something you and your educational institution can market – for delivering newly minted journalists who are ready for the challenges they'll face. They will get jobs, and that in turn, will help future graduates from your institution get jobs as well.

## I. GETTING STUDENTS READY WELL BEFORE THEIR LAST MONTHS – SPEAKERS, EXPERIENCE AND INTERNSHIPS

Often, students and their advisers don't start talking about jobs until their senior year, sometimes the last months of their senior year. That's understandable, and a lot can be done to teach them the mechanics in their last months. Yet if they haven't developed real-world working experience before then, employers will be reluctant to give them a chance. Prospective employers want experience, and the more professional evidence of that experience – published clips, tapes, video and website production – the more serious they will take your candidate. So here are three things to emphasize well before they're ready for the job market:

A) Internships. Students should start thinking about internships their freshman year, as they won't get the most competitive and professional ones without earlier experience. So start right away advising them to seek internships with local (both in the town of your university and in their hometown) news outlets – and to take an unpaid internship, even for a month or so in the summer or over winter break if they can't afford a summer-long unpaid internship. Think strategically with them about where they can get good experience, and then advise them on how to leverage that to better and more advanced internship opportunities. Also, advise them that an internship isn't only a way for them to show off their skills – it's a way for them to get a sense of the organization and the type of work that's done there, to determine if that's something they want to do in their career. Often, a taste of it will show them they want to focus on something else, which is much better to know your freshman or sophomore year than upon graduation.

B) Speakers. A great service you can provide is bringing in speakers who showcase different roles in journalism and different types of news organizations. Not only will

students be able to see the range of places they can work and where they should target for internships, yet often relationships start here. I've mentored and hired students I've met at colleges when I've been a speaker. Use your contacts and see who you can tap – and then prepare the students for this well. And again, make the speakers available to freshmen and sophomores as well, so they can seek years before they're headed to the job market.

C) Experience. Beyond internships, they should be developing their journalism craft throughout their college career. Student-run newspapers, TV and radio outlets, magazines and other online publications are a great place for them to get experience and also to develop critical leadership skills. Yet suggest that they go beyond that, and think creatively. Obviously, tapping the local media community for opportunities makes sense, yet sometimes there are other ways for them to get experience – such as in the publications department of your university, writing for the newsletters of local government or community organizations or helping develop content for a website for community or trade groups. Work-study students, with your encouragement and guidance, may be able to use that required time to do something that will provide them with clips and experience. Often, this type of experience is critical in gaining good internships, which can lead to jobs.

## II. PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE JOB SEARCH – NETWORKING AND RESUMES

When it's time for them to start their job search, get them ready and help them get each other ready. Don't assume much in terms of what they know about how to network and how to prepare a resume. If you can, devote class time to this and require preparation and production just as you would in any class, with their grade dependent on how well they do. If that's not possible, set aside time for this, and have them help each other. A few tips:

A) Networking. The basics of networking for students follow those for professionals – they are most likely going to get a job through someone they know, and especially someone they've worked with before – meaning fellow students or teachers. It's all give-and-take with networking. So discuss with them developing their network, keeping in touch with people in their network, using online social networks like Facebook, Twitter and especially LinkedIn (have them develop LinkedIn profiles if they don't have them) as just one tool in their networking and keeping a network fresh throughout their career.

B) Make sure their Facebook pages and LinkedIn profiles are effective and don't contain any red flags. This is the first place that someone will check them out. Have them Google themselves and see what turns up, and discuss how to turn this to their advantage with an employer – and also how to minimize problems if you see them.

C) Work with them on focusing their job search – geographically, within an industry segment and to the appropriate kinds of jobs they are likely to find early in their career – so

that they can more effectively target employers and aren't being too general in a job search. For many of these students, it's the first time they have looked for a "real" job, and many will have trouble getting started – so anything you can do to help them, and have them help each other, in getting together their materials and figuring out where to apply would be a big help.

D) Resume preparation. A few tips: Most student resumes are too long given the kind of jobs and experience they've had; very few should be longer than a page for most journalism jobs. They should have their email address and a phone number at which they can easily be reached (that's key, an email address isn't enough), atop the resume; a street address is unnecessary and may hurt them if it's far away; companies are loathe to move people these days. Then they should have a few bullet points that sum up their skills and talents.

Then comes the chronological resume, highlighting their accomplishments (not just duties!) in their internships and other relevant experience, and their academic achievements, especially relevant work products. High-school experience should be left off, unless it's relevant (high-school newspaper or magazine, for instance). Summer work experience that's on point can be listed if they need it, though avoid padding. Don't embellish.

If they have other accomplishments – varsity or club sports; musical or other talent-based accomplishments – have them include these in an "other" section at the bottom. List expected degrees, and any academic honors.

Don't say "references available upon request." In their case, have a few listed, this will spark interest by employers. Have them go over each others' resumes and challenge them to find any spelling, grammatical or stylistic errors, and then revise and review, several times if possible. These days, any error gives an employer a resume to toss a resume; employers will not be forgiving.

### III. THE BASICS – INTERVIEWING AND FOLLOW-UP

Interviewing is a learned skill and even seasoned professionals can use practice. So the best thing you can do is to give your students loads of interview practice. Here are a few tips:

A) Interviewing. Practice, practice, practice. Start by encouraging your students to sit in front of a mirror and watch themselves as they answer questions from an imaginary interviewer. Have them note whether they fidget, look directly into the mirror, talk too fast or too slowly, or have a lot of filler sounds – "uhum," "y' know," "like that." Ask them to have someone video tape them.

Then, once they have critiqued themselves and sought to improve, have them interview each other. Have them all prepare beforehand – this is critical – and have the interviewer judge them on how much they knew about the (mock) organization, were prepared for

standard interview questions, and how they handled themselves non-verbally during the interview process. Then have them switch sides – being the interviewer will prepare them as much for the process as the interviewee, as they will see what kinds of things are annoying and distracting to an interviewer.

If you can, then bring in a few outsiders, even if they are from your school's admissions office or managers from elsewhere in the university that sometimes interview candidates for jobs. Have them conduct mock interviews – better yet, hold a mock job fair where the candidates will have to scuttle around and catch the interviewers' attention, and then have quick interviews with them. Have the outsiders critique your students just as their fellow students earlier did.

And if your school doesn't have a job fair, start one – even if it's small at first. The preparation that your students will do for a "real" job fair will likely be more substantial. If they have had rounds and rounds of practice interviews and interviews at mock and real job fairs, they will be well-practiced for interviews once they hit the job trail. It is that simple.

#### IV. YOUR ROLE IN THE PROCESS

As an educator, you are playing several roles in getting your students ready for the job market – teaching them job-getting skills, helping them gain the right experience and when appropriate, using your contacts to help them land jobs. On the last point, your help can be powerful in this regard, especially if you have kept up your professional network in the journalism world. Yet be careful here. Sometimes students will ask for your help in making contacts, and you aren't sure they would be a good fit there. Be honest with them, and be honest with employers who are seeking your advice on students. Your reputation – and that of your institution – will be on the line with these recommendations. If you send your best students for the jobs, and those who are likely to perform well, you and your school will be viewed as a feeder of young talent to that news organization and others. If you send a few "mistakes," those organizations won't take your word for it for very long, and will stop calling, shutting off an important hiring pipeline. Let students know that your recommendation is meaningful, and you only give it when it's appropriate – make them earn it.