



Special points of interest:

- SPJ Conference, September 4-6, 2014. www.spi.org
- Attend an online training session at the Poynter Institute www.poynter.org
- Stay abreast of the issues facing journalists with the Reporter's Committee for Freedom of the Press www.rcfp.org

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Journalism & Mass Communication

Student Review

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The JMC Connection is live

The Journalism and Mass Communication program has successfully launched the JMC Connection.

This is a venture designed to support journalism and mass communication students as you matriculate through the program. The group falls under Ashford University's Student Development and Engagement Office and it has a dedicated page on LinkedIn.

The JMC Connection was started by Dr. Teresa Taylor-Moore, a full-time faculty member in the program. Dr. Taylor-Moore began the group with three specific



The JMC Connection LinkedIn page is open to all students enrolled in the program and who are on LinkedIn.

purposes in mind:

- (1) Provide a space where students and faculty could discuss topics related to preparation for a career in the field of journalism and mass communication
- (2) Provide an opportunity for students to create a

support group for one another as they search for careers in their field and

- (3) Create a space to post opportunities for students that include networking, outside internship opportunities, and information on conferences and competitions.

The ultimate goal of the JMC Connection is to bridge the gap between classroom learning, the development of the professional portfolio and create connections to better enhance your success as you embark on careers in the field.

AU student pens winning essay

Ashford University's journalism program recently became the first ever online-based program to be approved to charter a student chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

In honor of this accomplishment, AU offered a scholarship opportunity for one current member of Ashford student chapter to attend SPJ's

Excellence in Journalism 2014 Conference on Sept. 4-6 in Nashville, Tenn.

SPJ at AU member and current AU journalism major Rachel Gribble penned the winning essay that landed her the AU/SPJ Scholarship worth \$1,105 to attend EIJ14.

Read Rachel's winning entry on page 2 of this newsletter.





By Rachel Gribble,
AU journalism major
and SPJ at AU member

“While there is no substitute for hands-on experience, the educational opportunities offered by SPJ can help me hone my skills as a journalist, making me a more qualified job candidate.”

How AU and SPJ are changing my career, future

Online degrees have been looked down upon since their inception.

Just look at the barbs (media personality) Jon Stewart throws about the University of Phoenix, or listen to the tone of your aunt’s voice when she asks how you’re managing to attend classes while working 40 hours a week.

THE PUBLIC OPINION of online degree programs suggests that these programs are only for the lazy, the underachieving and those who couldn’t get into a “real” school.

Ashford University and the Society of Professional Journalists are on a mission to change that misguided way of thinking, and I am with them.

I am not your stereotypical online student. I attended Ohio University for three years, struggling to find my place at the prestigious Scripps School of Journalism. Each year, I felt more and more displaced: I didn’t fit into one of the prepackaged journalism sequences and found no help from my advisers, professors or peers.

WHEN I TRIED writing for the quarterly campus magazine, I only felt more displaced. I wanted to investigate the rising tuition, while my editor made it clear that the magazine had to play

nice with the administration. I felt unwelcome at the newspaper, and I was intimidated by the overt competitiveness between staff writers.

Feeling lost and that I made a mistake by making journalism my nature, I left Athens and Scripps, convinced that my dream of a journalism degree was dead.

After almost two years of working in the medical field, I decided to return to school. Going back to OU was out of the question: I couldn’t afford it. Then, I discovered Ashford University offered an online bachelor’s degree in journalism and mass communication. I applied immediately and started my first online class two weeks later.

FOR ALMOST A year, I wasn’t convinced I was spending my time and money on the best degree I had the means to obtain. Many of my classes had several students who couldn’t recognize the difference between *there*, *their* and *they’re*. I knew I was doing well in the classes, but were my grades better than those of the students who couldn’t be bothered to use spell-check before submitting a discussion post?

The doubt did not end there. I read horror stories online of alumni who were, in effect, laughed

out of interviews because they had an online degree. The hiring statistics back these horror stories up.

According to a 2012 article by *Time* writer Kayla Webley, the Society for Human Resource Management reported that 66 percent of human resource managers said that online graduates would not be considered as favorable job candidates if they were up against graduates who have degrees from traditional brick-and-mortar universities.

DESPITE MY DOUBTS, I was working harder than I did at OU. Because online classes allow students to log in and complete coursework according to their schedules, there are no lectures and it is hard to get a coherent group discussion about the week’s topics. This forces the students to actually complete the readings, which was something I hardly needed to do at OU.

However, despite how hard I worked, I was frustrated by the lack of respect online students received from prospective employers and the general public.

See AU/SPJ contd., page 4.

Journalism 101: Choose the best possible sources

Reporters, by virtue of what they choose to include or omit from a given story, are *gatekeepers*, as are the sources journalists contact to gather information for their stories.

As most professional journalists will attest, choosing the best possible source—not just going with who’s available at deadline time—is imperative. (Broadcast journalism is typically most guilty of going with whichever “talking head” is available when the cameras are ready to roll, but no area of journalism (viz., print, online or broadcast) is immune from

making such a poor call.)

As observed by media scholar James Stovall (2012), interviewing is considered the most important job that journalists do, because this is the primary way we gather information for our stories. Thus, having the most credible source possible for a story should be a goal of each writer no matter the medium.



Granted, the No. 1 source sought won’t always be available, but as a responsible journalist, one has a duty to always seek this source and not merely settle for, say, the source’s PR representative or a prepared statement versus an actual interview.

Just as it is important to prepare to conduct an interview, it is equally vital to evaluate the credibility of potential sources and the information they can provide prior preparing your interview questions. Always choose the best possible sources.

— Lisa L. Rollins, Ph.D., Ed.S.

Stovall, J. G. (2012). *Writing for the mass media* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage.

7 interviewing tips for newsgathering success

1. One of the ways one can help achieve a positive interview experience is by being prepared. Do your research in advance. Doing so shows the interviewee that you are interested in them and helps set a professional and positive tone for the interview. (You will likely be a favored reporter for future interviews, too.)

2. *A good interview mirrors a good conversation.* It’s a simple sentence, but its message is invaluable. Interviews can make people anxious, nervous and uncomfortable. In a good interview, a source quickly understands why he or she is speaking with you and feels comfortable providing you with information.

3. Have more questions than you need, just in case. Beginning journalism students should prepare at least 20 good questions, even if they

won’t have time to cover more than five or so.

4. Don’t be afraid to veer from your interview script a bit if your interview subject brings up topics you did not prep for, especially if they are topics that have been previously unreported. Your goal is to provide your audience with accurate, fresh information, not the same old stories. You are the “driver” when it comes to the interview—you can always bring the source back to the topic at hand.

5. Ask your interview questions in an appropriate order, but don’t neglect to ask your most important questions before your interview time is up. You will need to ease into the tougher questions, to be sure, but if you establish a rapport by being well researched, punctual and professional, you are more likely to get answers to those

tougher questions when you insert them in the dialogue.

6. Don’t go off the record, if asked to. Simply tell your interview subject that you prefer to focus only on information that you can report, not information that you cannot use.

7. Always take notes, even when recording, because when you least expect it, something will go wrong with the recorder, somehow. You don’t want to tell someone you need to do the interview again because your recorder wasn’t working. *Ugh.* ... Take good notes!

Always remember you represent not only you, but the profession of journalism at large. Being prepared and professional is job No. 1.

—Lisa L. Rollins, Ph.D. Ed.S.

“Don’t go off the record. ... (F)ocus only on information you can report, not information that you cannot use.”



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Journalism and Mass Communication

In Journalism and Mass Communication, we are committed to our program growth and the development of each student. We are available to answer any questions that you may have and help find the assistance that you need to enhance your success in the program and at Ashford University.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact one of our full-time faculty members. We also invite you to get connected with our student chapter of the Society for Professional Journalists and the JMC Connection to make the very best of your experience in the field.



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AU/SPJ contd.

Applying for internships only compounded my frustration: most internships in my area required that the school offers an internship credit, and I experienced the discrimination against online students firsthand.

EVEN THOUGH I have two years of professional work experience, all the interviewers were more interested in what school I would be graduating from, and none were familiar with Ashford. I was tired of others not valuing my coursework as much as I did.

When the Ashford University journalism department announced they were seeking a charter from Society of Professional Journalists, I was ecstatic. This was an opportunity to gain experience that I could not get in the classroom, and the organization lends legitimacy to Ashford itself.

I am now a part of an expansive network of journalists. Some have worked for major news outlets, while others are students like me, trying to make it in the world. While there is no substitute for hands-on experience, the educational opportunities offered by SPJ can help me hone my skills as a journalist, making me a more qualified job candidate.

BY ATTENDING VARIOUS seminars and conferences and attending my chapter's meetings, I will be able to network with journalists from all career levels and walks of life. This organization gives me the hope and encouragement I need to become a journalist.

SPJ at Ashford has already made history simply for being the first online chapter, and we will continue to do so while proving all the naysayers wrong.

—Rachel Gribble