

# An Analysis of the Importance of Selected Course Areas to Television News Internships in Tennessee

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This study examines the importance placed on several selected course areas by television station news directors, higher education faculty, and television news interns within the state of Tennessee. The Tennessee based data was gathered as a part of a larger study which encompassed the states of Arkansas, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

## Introduction

Collaborative efforts between the world of work and the world of academics appear at a time when there is a demand for degree programs in higher education which prepare students for employment. Kendall<sup>1</sup> pointed out that parents of students in higher education often place a high value on programs that feature experiential education and that focus on the students' vocational development, money earning potential, and the establishment of job contacts. Throughout this decade it appears, therefore, that a major concern of students will be employment after graduation.<sup>2</sup>

"We must begin to explore whether improved collaborative efforts can help us to integrate liberal education, work, and human development," suggested Chickering.<sup>3</sup> He wrote, even more pointedly, we must "lift ourselves to the level of competence and personal development required by the challenging world that we face in the decades ahead."

In his book, **Democracy and Education**, John Dewey supported Chickering's point of view when he stated, "As formal teaching and training grow in extent, there is the danger of creating an undesirable split between the experience gained in more direct associations and what is acquired in school."<sup>4</sup> Dewey's thought seems to suggest that educators must understand that knowledge gained through experiential development should not be separated from the student's cognitive development.

## Mass Media Internships

Throughout the rather brief history of mass media internships, journalism departments have had the longest history of internship placement.<sup>5</sup> More and more universities and colleges have developed internship programs to give students academic credit for professional type experiences. These professional internships are widely prevalent in journalism and mass communication programs and they continue to grow.<sup>6</sup> By 1984, over one thousand colleges and universities in the United States offered some form of internship program, and many departments of communication or mass media found that their curriculums encouraged the establishment of such a program in their schools.<sup>7</sup>

Within the area of mass communication there has been a considerable variation in the levels and the types of internship programs.<sup>8</sup> As more and more mass communication departments arranged for on-site internships, it became obvious that every internship is a unique experience, involving student, instructor, and on-site supervisor. The diversity of internships permits no ironclad rules applying to each internship and to all the people involved.<sup>9</sup>

## Need for the Study

There is a need to determine, therefore, what the general background and course preparation should be for the broadcast student who undertakes a television broadcast news internship at a commercial television station. While several studies, including those by Fisher<sup>10</sup>, Hudson<sup>11</sup>, and Jankowski<sup>12</sup>, attempted to determine what skills and competencies the broadcast student should have upon graduation, none dealt with what skills and competencies a student ought to carry into an internship at a commercial television station's news department.

The differences in perspectives which the broadcast educator, the on-site supervisor, and the news internship student bring to the television internship experience, concerning what they believe to be the important and necessary requisite course areas for the intern to have mastered, should be examined.

## Study Questions

Two questions exist as priorities to studying requisite courses critical to student readiness for a television broadcast news internship. What course areas should the broadcast intern be required to take before the internship experience? What course areas are most beneficial to the broadcast news intern as viewed by the on-site supervisors, the television news interns, and the academic advisors?

## Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to higher education faculty active in television news education, broadcast students who had served television broadcast news internships, and commercial television station news directors who had acted as on-site supervisors of news interns. The scope of the original study, conducted between January and April of 1985, included the states of Arkansas, Kentucky, and Tennessee.<sup>13</sup> This paper concerns itself with the responses of three

Tennessee constituencies. It deals only with their responses to a questionnaire requesting information about what they believed to be requisite courses needed by a television news intern. Attempts were made to get all television stations and all four-year college and university communication departments to respond to the questionnaire.

### Description of the Population and Samples

Responses were sought from Tennessee broadcast educators and higher education departments of communication listed in the College Entrance Examination Board's, **The College Handbook** and **TV Guide Almanac**. **TV Guide Almanac** provided a listing of many colleges and universities with developed programs of broadcast education. Attempts were made to elicit responses from all four-year Tennessee colleges and universities.

A second group was made up of professional broadcasters. This group consisted of those who made their living by working professionally as television station news directors. The news director population was taken from **Broadcasting/Cablecasting Yearbook 1984** and **TV Guide Almanac**. Personnel employed at non-commercial broadcast stations were not included in the study.

A third group, television news interns, was contacted for research information. Since there was no way the names and addresses of students serving internships could be known when the study began, questionnaires were sent only to those student interns whose names and addresses were supplied by faculty, internship coordinators, or departmental chairpersons. Included in the survey instrument sent to higher education communication faculty was a request for names and addresses of interns who had participated in their college internship program as television news interns at a commercial television station.

There is a precedent for such a technique to be used to identify the names of interns. A study by Hagen<sup>14</sup> successfully used this technique for gathering access to names and addresses of interns. As Hagen had earlier discovered, the faculty responses to this question gave legitimacy to the request for intern names and addresses on the faculty survey questionnaires.

### The Survey Instrument

The questionnaire<sup>15</sup> included a section which listed 12 areas of course work. This section was developed to determine the importance of each of the areas of study to a student undertaking a broadcast news internship at a commercial television station. The areas ranged from general liberal arts courses to the more specific professional preparation courses. The 12 course areas, listed in alphabetical order on the questionnaire, were: American history, communication law, economics, English composition, English grammar, government, interpersonal communication, logic and reasoning, political science, television production, typing, and sociology.

Respondents were requested to use a Likert-type rating scale for each item. The scale was: 5 for "Of Utmost Importance," 4 for "Very Important," 3 for "Important," 2 for "Somewhat Important," 1 for "Not Important," and 0 for "Not Applicable."

### Method of Statistical Analysis

A One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the means of the three groups on each of the questionnaire items. The ANOVA tested the differences in the means of the samples to determine if any differences were large enough to conclude that the populations represented significantly differed in their responses. The study attempted to yield a "yes" or "no" answer to the question: are the means of the groups on each questionnaire item significantly different?

The level of significance selected for the statistical analysis of the data gathered for the study was established at the .05 level prior to completion of the data gathering and before the ANOVA for each questionnaire item was computed. If  $p < .05$  was indicated for an item when the means were compared, the null hypothesis (that there would be no difference among the response means of the three groups) would not be accepted.

### Analysis of the Findings

The responses of all three Tennessee groups concerning academic areas of importance to news internships indicated that each thought English grammar, English composition, and typing to be in the range of "Very Important" to "Of Utmost Importance." The standard deviations within each of the three groups also indicated that there was little question on the part of the respondents of the importance that should be placed by the news interns as well as colleges in those areas of study.

The results of the responses to the academic areas section of the questionnaire are presented in Table 1.

Of the 12 course areas listed on the questionnaire, the null hypothesis for 11 was accepted. The one course area where the null was rejected ( $p < .05$ ) was Television Production. The student television news interns rated the television production course area extremely high and near the "Of Utmost Importance" level; faculty rated the study of television production at the "Very Important" level; while Tennessee television news directors saw the study of television production by the news intern as somewhat less important and near the "Important" level.

Faculty and television news directors rated the importance of a knowledge of American history near the "Very Important" range, but the TV news interns rated it lower.

**TABLE 1**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, and F-Ratios of**  
**Tennessee News Directors, Faculty, and Interns**  
**Concerning the Importance of Selected Academic Areas**

	News Directors <sup>a</sup>		HIED Faculty <sup>b</sup>		TV News Interns <sup>c</sup>		F-Ratio	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
American History	3.88	1.32	3.76	.83	3.18	.87	1.60	p>.05
Communication Law	4.12	.78	3.71	.99	4.27	1.27	1.28	p>.05
Economics	4.00	.79	3.41	1.00	3.18	1.17	2.76	p>.05
English Composition	4.82	.39	4.65	.70	4.45	.69	1.28	p>.05
English Grammar	4.88	.49	4.65	.70	4.64	.67	.79	p>.05
Government	4.29	.77	3.59	1.28	3.91	.70	2.20	p>.05
Interpersonal Communication	3.47	1.12	4.00	1.00	4.18	1.32	1.57	p>.05
Logic & Reasoning	3.53	1.18	3.59	1.06	3.27	1.35	.25	p>.05
Political Science	4.06	.90	3.71	.98	3.73	.65	.81	p>.05
TV Production	3.29	1.21	4.00	1.06	4.64	.67	5.64	p<.05
Typing	4.18	1.01	4.53	.62	4.18	.75	.96	p>.05
Sociology	3.41	1.00	3.35	1.00	3.27	1.10	.06	p>.05

a n=17      b n=17      c n=11

The study of economics was rated at the "Very Important" level by news directors, lower by the faculty group and still lower by interns.

While all three groups indicated the study of government to be near the "Very Important" level in their ratings, the news directors gave it much more importance than did the faculty and the news interns. Television news directors rated the study of government between the "Very Important" and the "Of Utmost Importance" levels.

All 12 of the subject areas listed on the questionnaire were shown to be at or above the "important" level by the means of the three groups.

A ranking of the 12 subject areas using the mean scores of the three Tennessee groups is presented in Table 2. Illustrated in Table 2 is the relative importance each of the groups placed upon each course area. One of the more interesting aspects is the importance placed on course work in television production by each group's constituency. The interns gave top priority to the necessity of a course in television production, rating it equally with English grammar. The ranking for news directors, on the other hand, was twelfth. News directors did, however, rate the need for a course in television production above the "Important" level.

**TABLE 2**  
**Subject Areas Important to Television News Interns**  
**As Ranked by Tennessee News Directors, Faculty, and Interns**

News Directors	X	Faculty	X	TV News Interns	X
1. English Grammar	4.88	1.5 English Composition	4.65	1.5 English Grammar	4.64
2. English Composition	4.82	1.5 English Grammar	4.65	1.5 TV Production	4.64
3. Government	4.29	3. Typing	4.53	3. English Composition	4.45
4. Typing	4.18	4.5 Interpersonal Comm.	4.00	4. Communication Law	4.27
5. Communication Law	4.12	4.5 TV Production	4.00	5.5 Interpersonal Comm.	4.18
6. Political Science	4.06	6. American History	3.76	5.5 Typing	4.18
7. Economics	4.00	7.5 Communication Law	3.71	7. Government	3.91
8. American History	3.88	7.5 Political Science	3.71	8. Political Science	3.73
9. Logic & Reasoning	3.53	9.5 Government	3.59	9.5 Logic & Reasoning	3.27
10. Interpersonal Comm.	3.47	9.5 Logic & Reasoning	3.59	9.5 Sociology	3.27
11. Sociology	3.41	11. Economics	3.41	11.5 American History	3.18
12. TV Production	3.29	12. Sociology	3.35	11.5 Economics	3.18

The responses of the three Tennessee groups, when ranked, fell into five general areas: writing, communication law, interpersonal communication, technical, and liberal arts.

All three of the groups rated the most important of the course areas to be writing skills. Those included the importance of sound backgrounds in English grammar and English composition. Typing skill was also included in the writing skills and was rated as "Very Important" by all three groups.

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A background in communication law was shown to be important to the prospective television news intern. A course in communication law was ranked seventh or higher by each group.

Communication skills were also indicated to be of importance to the prospective news intern. The rankings indicate the necessity for a course in interpersonal communication.

The ranking of the group means pointed out the importance of study in the technical area. All three groups rated a course in television production above the "Important" level. The television news interns indicated that they believed a television production course to be near the "Of Utmost Importance" level.

The rankings indicated that the three Tennessee groups believed that a liberal arts base was important to the television news intern. Such broad course areas as government, political science, American history, economics, logic and reasoning, and sociology were generally thought to be important by the groups.

### Curricular Implications Derived from the Study

The study pointed to some important implications for the development of broadcast curricula in higher education. It demonstrated that a college program which was aimed at providing the necessary tools for a television news intern needed to assure that the intern would have developed, prior to the internship experience, sound language expression skills, strong writing competencies, technical competence in television production, strong interpersonal communication skills, a knowledge of communication law, and a strong liberal arts background. Broadcasting curricula, then, should assure that television news interns demonstrate proficiency with writing, personal communication, typing, language expression, communication law, and the liberal arts.

### Need For Further Research

Further research should be done to identify specific courses area which ought to be required of the broadcasting student in preparation for the news internship. While this study succinctly demonstrated those general course areas of value to the intern, specific research needs to be done concerning more precise segments of study. For example, research into what special broadcast writing courses would benefit the intern should be conducted. Future research should investigate what order the curriculum should be presented to the student.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>J.C. Kendall, *Values As the Core of Institutional Commitment: Finding a Common Ground*, In T.C. Little (ed.), *Making Sponsored Experiential Learning Standard Practice*, New Directions for Experiential Learning, No. 20, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1983), p.35.

<sup>2</sup>T.C. Little, *The Institutional Context for Experiential Learning*, In T.C. Little (Ed.), *Making Sponsored Experiential Learning Standard Practice*, New Directions for Experiential Learning, No. 20, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1983), p.21.

<sup>3</sup>A.W. Chickering, *Education, Work, and Human Development*, In T.C. Little (Ed.), *Making Sponsored Experiential Learning Standard Practice*, New Directions for Experiential Learning, No. 20, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1983), p.15.

<sup>4</sup>J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1916), p.11.

<sup>5</sup>D.C. Simpson, *Urban Internships Demonstrate Value in Tight Job Market*, *Journalism Educator*, 30 (1975), p.47.

<sup>6</sup>H.P. Cowdin, *More and More Schools Offer Internship Credit*, *Journalism Educator*, 33 (1978), p.11.



- <sup>7</sup>J. Hanson, *Internships and the Individual: Suggestions for Implementing (Or Improving) An Internship Program*, *Communication Education*, 33 (1980), p.3.
- <sup>8</sup>B. Garrison, *RE: Internships*, *Journalism Educator*, 36 (1983), p.3.
- <sup>9</sup>L. Schager Gross, *The Internship Experience*, (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1981), p.1.
- <sup>10</sup>H.A. Fisher, *Broadcast Journalists' Perceptions of Appropriate Career Preparation*, *Journalism Quarterly*, 55 (1978), 140-144.
- <sup>11</sup>J.C. Hudson, *Radio-TV News Staff Employers Prefer Broadcast Degree*, *Strong Liberal Arts Foundation*, *Journalism Educator*, 36 (1981), 27-28, 46.
- <sup>12</sup>L.T. Jankowski, *Broadcast News Curriculum Mirrors Stations' Needs*, *Journalism Educator*, 36, (1981), 56-60.
- <sup>13</sup>The breakdown of the total responses to the original study which involved news directors, college faculty, and television news interns within the three-state area was as follows: 36 of 41 commercial television station news directors replied; 59 of 70 higher education faculty replied; and 30 of 46 news interns who were identified during the course of the study. The total response rate for the original study was 80 percent (125 responses out of a possible 157).
- <sup>14</sup>S.J. Hagen, *Internship Problems and the Academic Advisor's Role*, (Anaheim, California: Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, 1981), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 209 695.
- <sup>15</sup>The survey questionnaire was divided into four parts. The first section was made up of 19 statements designed to elicit responses to knowledge and skills which the news intern should have prior to beginning the internship experience. The second section consisted of eight statements related to possible activities in which the news intern might participate while at the TV station. A third section listed 12 higher education course areas which might be of importance to the news intern. There was also a fourth section of the questionnaire which requested written responses to two open-ended questions regarding television news internships.

