

Perspectives

A personal view of the University

Summer at WGRZ

I had been watching television all of my life, but never once had I thought about working behind the cameras. Last year, however, I went looking for a summer internship, and although my major is magazine journalism, I ended up at WGRZ-TV in Buffalo, N.Y.

I began working, as a college junior, for a station that I had watched through my entire youth. I had very little previous experience with the electronic media and doubted that I wanted a career in television. But my internship gave me an opportunity to find out—about television, about my Newhouse School education, and about full-time, professional employment in general. It was the ideal way to spend the summer prior to senior year.

I was one of the 400 or so students who take an internship each year through SU's Community Internship Program. CIP, in existence for about 15 years, is an academic credit-granting division of the University, supervised by the Office of Academic Affairs. The program places students from all majors in internships, during both the academic semester and the summer. Students pay for internships per academic credit, just like summer courses.

Each internship is individually designed, monitored, and evaluated. Interns must draft an acceptable learning proposal and obtain a faculty sponsor, and the workplace supervisor outlines learning objectives for the student. The student must correspond weekly with the faculty sponsor and inform the sponsor of progress and new experiences at the internship. If the faculty member is not satisfied, he notifies the intern's work supervisor and CIP. Interns cannot function as mere "gophers"; the internship must be educational.

In my case, the education began early. I *did* start out photocopying scripts and taking phone messages, but I did not plan to spend my entire summer standing at the copy-

ing machine. I realized I had to become familiar with the studio before I could assume other responsibilities, and it became clear to me that I would have to ask a lot of questions. I realized that I, as the intern, must make the first move. Prospective employers are looking for self-starters, and so the intern who ferrets out challenges is likely to fare well in the professional world.

My very first day at Channel 2 was the Fourth of July. I don't know if the limited size of the studio or the scarcity of staff members surprised me more. The entire news broadcast was going to be written, directed, and produced by a skeleton crew in a studio no larger than a small warehouse.

The producer needed a holiday angle for the show, but could not very well send out his only photographer to shoot family picnics and fireworks. So he used the picture of George Washington on a dollar bill to pay tribute to our Founding Fathers and opened the show with Ray Charles' version of "America the Beautiful." He also introduced a bit of a twist on the nation's birthday by doing a package on the role of the French in our fight for independence, adding flavor to what would otherwise have been a slow news day. The first thing I learned about the television professionals is that they are resourceful.

Within my first week, I had graduated from the photocopier and had ample work to keep me busy. My first challenge at Channel 2 was assigned to me by the producer of the six-o'clock news. She wanted me to write a story from wire copy about a fire in a New Hampshire boarding house. I did not know where to start or how long to make the piece. The facts on the wire were so disjointed I didn't know how to organize them.

When the assignment editor sensed I was stuck, she told me to pretend that I was telling the story to the typewriter. "Just write it like you were telling me over the phone," she said. Suddenly the task, which at first had seemed so difficult, became automatic, par-



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ticularly when I recognized that the wire report was the real-life equivalent of the fact sheets handed out in NEW 205, "News-writing."

I was able to apply other classroom learning to my internship at WGRZ. My copy-editing experience, although limited to homework assignments, was also put to good use. The producer of the international news show gave me the job of proofreading his scripts. Often he would ask me how his stories sounded. Again, I had to train myself to actually hear the words I was writing and sometimes even say them aloud. I learned that a good lead should be no longer than one breath. Though my Newhouse School training is in a written discipline, I learned to account not only for how the words read, but how they sounded as well.

I also learned that news people must be ready for anything. I accompanied a reporter and photographer on a live spot to an outdoor fashion show and dance festival. Because the satellite truck could not get close enough to the shot to hook up the camera and sound cables, the photographer had to plug the cables into a department store power line just moments before the spot aired.

And by the last day of my internship I learned that I, too, must be ready for anything. That day I was told—just *10 minutes* before the noon news—that I would be running "the prompter". The prompter is a device that allows the anchors to read the news while looking directly into the camera—an overhead projector of sorts, attached to a monitor in front of the anchor desk, through which the entire script is fed. Depending on how fast the intern operating the prompter feeds the script, the anchors will either be able to keep up and present the news calmly or they will race breathlessly through headlines of the day.

Unfortunately, the prompter is a very sensitive machine. I noticed the anchors reading from their desktop scripts a few times, and I sensed that they were relieved each time the Downy ads came on. It was the longest half hour of my life.

Throughout the summer, I felt that my co-workers had a certain fascination with me. Never before had Channel 2 seen an intern from Syracuse University's esteemed Newhouse School. "What do they teach there?" and "What kinds of facilities do they have?" were not uncommon questions. Perhaps what interested them more was that I was in a magazine program.

I think my critics genuinely enjoyed my creative delivery of the facts. I found that often I was given featury, upbeat stories to write and was asked how I would approach a story idea. Beginning my internship, I had never thought I would be in a position to contribute, but when my first piece aired I knew that I had.

I still favor the print media and am focusing my job search on magazines and publishing houses. I will also send my resumé to WGRZ and other stations, however, because my internship helped me develop marketable skills in another medium. I know now that I can work in print or broadcast journalism. Because of my internship, the choice is mine.

—Holly Himmelfarb