

# Career Connections

---

## Journalism

### OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

Professional journalists need a wide variety of skills and abilities. They must be strong (and fast) writers who are good at drawing information out of their sometimes reluctant sources. They also must be top-notch researchers able to analyze and interpret complex situations and organize large volumes of information in a logical, clear, and succinct manner.

Journalists also must have a wide range of knowledge of many fields. A local government reporter, for example, might need to know something about municipal tax structures, state public records laws, and the movement of groundwater to write a story about a city's need for a new waste treatment plant. A journalist covering a murder trial might need an understanding of DNA testing, schizophrenia, and her state's death penalty history in order to put the case's verdict in the proper context. Most reporters don't have this kind of specific knowledge in this many different fields when they graduate from college, but classes in a wide range of fields (biology, political science, law, and psychology, in these cases) help give them a general understanding of many areas. They then use their research and critical thinking skills and their on-the-job smarts to get up to speed on a particular issue.

Given these job parameters, a liberal arts education is a great background for someone who wants to be a journalist. In the classroom, students gain knowledge in a wide variety of fields and, even more importantly, learn the kinds of analytical and active learning skills needed to write about our increasingly complex world. Extra-curricular activities, internships, and related jobs then help them hone their skills, expose them to deadline pressure, allow them to apply their knowledge in a meaningful way, and provide them with opportunities to build a portfolio of professional work.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Exploring Options

To quickly get a feel for what professional journalists are saying about their careers and the industry, you can log on to one of many journalism web sites. These feature essays and articles on journalism, examples of award-winning news reports, book reviews, job information, trade news, and links to journalism discussion groups. Recommended web sites include: [www.cjr.org](http://www.cjr.org), (the Columbia Journalism Review), [www.spj.org](http://www.spj.org) (The Society of Professional Journalists), [www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org) (The Poynter Institute), [www.nab.org](http://www.nab.org) (National Association of Broadcasters) and [www.rtnda.org](http://www.rtnda.org) (The Radio and Television News Directors Association).

Journalists love to write about their profession and the issues that surround it as much as they love to write about the rest of the world. If you're curious about the recent history of journalism in America or the ethical and professional issues that confront today's journalists, you might consider reading Katharine Graham's Pulitzer Prize-winning autobiography *Personal History*, Jack Fuller's book on journalism ethics *News Values*, and *Leaving Readers Behind: The Age of Corporate Newspapering*, Thomas Kunkel and Charles Layton, eds. The Poynter Institute, the non-profit foundation that owns the

*St. Petersburg Times*, also publishes an annual series of best newspaper stories that contains some marvelous writing and reporting.

The Hanover College Career Center also has a number of resources that can help you learn more about the profession. Journalism is a great profession to job shadow, and the Career Center has a list of Hanover alumni who now are working in journalism and who would be willing to host or mentor students interested in the field. Job shadowing is an excellent way to really understand what a reporter's life is like on a daily basis. You can watch them interview sources, attend meetings, or visit accident scenes, and observe how the hunks of unorganized information gathered over the course of the day are transformed into a polished story as deadline approaches.

You also might consider talking to Hanover students and alumni who have completed internships. Hanoverians have worked at regional television stations and web sites, magazines, newspapers, and with the college's own public relations staff. These former student interns can tell you about their experiences and offer helpful suggestions. Professors and career center staff can put you in touch with someone in your area of interest.

Last but not least, if you're interested in journalism, you should become a regular reader, listener, or viewer. You can't get a behind-the-scenes picture just from religiously following TV reports or a web site, but becoming a regular news hound will give you some sense of the medium. Pay attention to what stories are covered, how they're covered, and what follow-ups look or sound like. Take note of bylines and on-camera appearances. How many stories does a particular staff member write or present in a week? Think about the language of news – the voice, tone, and vocabulary of reporters. The more you immerse yourself in the field, the better prepared you'll be to take on this voice yourself when the time comes.

## **Academics**

Professional journalists come from all academic backgrounds and walks of life. Nationally, while some students choose to major in journalism, an equal or greater number choose to major in the liberal arts field that most interests them so that they can then focus on that subject as a professional journalist.

Regardless of your major, the Educational Testing Service recommends that no more than one-fourth of a student's courses be in journalism. The rest should be in a wide variety of other subjects including "economics, English, history, language, literature, philosophy, political science, psychology, sociology, and sciences" so that you are well grounded in a wide variety of subjects and have the research and critical thinking skills that you need to tackle our ever-changing world. You don't have to make yourself an expert in everything (these days nobody can be); but simply be a good thinker, a good writer, and a good learner with the skills to educate yourself about new issues as they come up.

That said, there are certain skills, terminology, and concepts that future employers will expect an aspiring journalist to know. Several courses at Hanover offer this instruction: we recommend that you consider taking at least two of the following courses:

ENG 251	American Journalism	COM 246	Writing for the Broadcast Media
ENG 351	Nonfiction Workshop	COM 260	Special Topics: Studio Production
		COM344	Electronic News Gathering

While the English courses focus on print journalism and the Communication courses emphasize broadcast media, aspiring journalists should note that new technology and industry consolidation are

changing traditional boundaries between print and electronic publications. Students are advised to gain some experience with print, broadcast and the Internet.

We also strongly recommend that aspiring journalists take courses in American politics, state and local government, micro- and macroeconomics, basic law, and general biology. You also should keep in mind that professionals in the field are expected to have an understanding of international affairs, geography, history, and social issues.

Hanover's study abroad program at the University of Wollongong also offers a number of classes for students who are interested in journalism or in writing for film, television, and theater.

## **Co-Curricular Activities**

While the broad knowledge base achieved through a liberal arts education can help you to thrive once you become a working journalist, the baccalaureate degree alone will generally not be sufficient to gain employment. Editors and news directors will want to see evidence of reporting experience and copies of your published or broadcast work. This experience can be gained through a combination of extra-curricular activities, internships, and employment.

Hanover has a bi-weekly student newspaper, *The Triangle*, a campus cable channel, and the Hanover Radio Network, where students can broadcast their own shows. If you are interested in journalism, either of these would be good places to start gaining experience in the field. When hiring for internships or permanent positions, employers look primarily at previous experience – evidence of publication or production credits. Gaining publication and production credits through on-campus media outlets is an excellent way to build the clips and video necessary for the next stepping stone – the internships that will, in turn, gain you the job experience essential in getting your first professional job. (More on this later.)

Students interested in print journalism can get basic experience in many areas at *The Triangle*, including writing, editing, layout and design, graphics, and photography. Students interested in broadcast journalism can gain experience writing, shooting, editing, and producing for television through the Student Broadcasting Association and its work with the Hanover cable TV channel. We recommend two years of writing for *The Triangle* with one year in an editorial position or two years active membership in the Student Broadcast Association, producing multiple news segments or programs each semester and serving as an officer with production responsibilities. Working with these two organizations will provide you with technical skills and leadership experience while helping you to confront the ethical issues of the profession.

You also might take a leadership role in the Communication Club, in Student Senate, in the Haq Center, and with the Center for Free Inquiry, Hanover's multi-disciplinary institute. The Communication Club can help you gain more insight and experience in the field, as well as expose you to speakers and alumni. Involvement with the Senate is a great way to get hands-on experience in representative government and how elected bodies work, as well as demonstrating leadership abilities. The Haq Center will expose you to international students and issues in a real and meaningful way. The CFI, meanwhile, brings to campus prominent speakers in many areas, offering opportunities for you to witness and participate in discussions on a variety of national and international concerns and to interview these people for campus TV, radio, and newspaper stories.

## **Work Experience**

### ***On-Campus Jobs***

*Learning Center:* Writing well is critical for both print and broadcast journalists. Helping others to write papers will help improve your own writing skills.

*Campus Channel:* The campus channel offers paid positions and internships involving programming, public relations, and videography. These positions offer opportunities to gain real television experience to include on your resume.

*Haq Center:* Working or volunteering at the Haq Cultural Center, which serves Hanover's minority and international students, can help further your understanding of international affairs and social/cultural issues.

### ***Related Jobs in the Area***

Madison and the cities of Louisville, Cincinnati, and Indianapolis offer a number of opportunities for students. Madison has a local newspaper, the *Madison Courier*, and a monthly cultural arts and entertainment magazine, *Round About Madison*. Both often are on the lookout for stringers – writers who are not employed full time but are paid by the story. They also welcome proposals for story ideas. Local radio stations, such as WORX/WXGO also hire student stringers and interns. This kind of work also is often conducive to a student's schedule. You can take on an assignment early in the semester or when you have some time without taking on a regular commitment. These kinds of clips also are vital when looking for a full-time job.

### ***Internships***

Both at Hanover and at larger campuses with large journalism programs, the internship is the bedrock of a student's experience. Employers look for this kind of on-the-job training when evaluating the job applications of graduating seniors. In fact, it is nearly impossible to get a full-time position with the larger media outlets unless you've had at least one internship. If you are interested in print journalism, opportunities are available at a wide range of sites including regional ones at *Indianapolis Monthly*, *The Louisville Magazine*, *Louisville Courier-Journal*, *Indianapolis Business Journal*, F & W Publications, and Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. If you are pursuing television or radio journalism, you might consider the paths of past students who have interned regionally at such sites as WLKY Channel 32, WISH-TV Channel 8, WFMS 95.5, FOX 19, and WHAS-11, and nationally at such sites as NBC in Miami and CNN-Crossfire in Washington, D.C. The Internship and Career Connections Coordinator at the Career Center has information on these internships and many more. He can help you with your internship search, guide you through the application process (including developing your résumé and cover letter), and teach you how to make the most of your internship.

In addition to skill development and self-exploration, internships also give students helpful opportunities to make contacts within the media organizations that they're interested in working for after graduation. Often these contacts can lead to full-time placement. Given these circumstances, we recommend that you have at least two internships at media organizations during your time at Hanover. You should be aware, however, that media internships often are unpaid. Students who need to support themselves can successfully manage this issue by arranging to intern two or three days a week and then holding down some other kind of job.

Kay Stokes  
English Department  
(Last Revised 6/08)

Elizabeth Winters  
Communication Department