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Capstone Seminar in Communication

Synthesis Paper

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When I started taking courses at Mitchell Community College (MCC) in Statesville, North Carolina, as a dual enrolled student I saw it as a stepping stone. It was a way for me to get some necessary credits out of the way while I focused on my dream of competing gymnastics at the collegiate level. However, I learned that often times life does not care what our plans are. Just weeks before the first competition of my senior year I was tumbling at an exhibition, performing a skill I had done perfectly for nearly ten years, and ruptured my Achilles tendon. Just like that my dreams were destroyed. Because the healing process was so long and difficult, I remained at home the following year taking several more classes at MCC. My hope was to make a full recovery and still be able to compete at the college level. After all, with two semesters of part time classes under my belt I would not be all that far behind other students my age. But again, my plan failed miserably. After over six months of nothing but rehab I was finally able to get back into the gym, but just a few short months later I injured my other ankle and had to have a complete reconstruction on the tendons in it. This time my dad told me it was essentially 'time to grow up' and focus on my education. It became apparent that the path I had chosen for myself was very different from the one I was actually about to take and I had to make a decision – hide in a hole and wallow in self pity for the rest of my life or actively pursue a new dream and find something else I could feel just as passionately about. I must admit, I did hide in that hole for longer than I should have, but eventually I chose to buckle down and graduate from MCC with an Associates degree in order to discover what else I could potentially excel at. While I was there I found myself very intrigued by the Communication Studies program and wound up transferring to WVU and selecting this as my major. Now I face

what could be the most terrifying, or maybe exciting, point in my life thus far; choosing a career path. Through the informational interview process and all the research I have been doing on my options I think that I may have finally found a new passion. I am incredibly drawn to the idea of working as an Olympic sports reporter or anchor and I am confident that the skills I have attained as a Communication Studies major will help me make this new dream a reality.

I have always been a sports fan and thought about working in the industry but never actually believed I could, especially not as a reporter. However, through my Capstone Experience and research I have realized that it is not only a very real possibility but that it is something I truly would love to do with my life. The informational interviews I conducted for this course definitely impacted my decision more than anything. After speaking with Mr. Alex Smith, associate producer for Comcast Sports, and having him tell me that the only regret he had in his career path was not attempting to work in front of the cameras before becoming a producer, I thought it would be foolish of me to make the same mistake. He told me it is practically impossible to go from producer to reporter but incredibly simple to become a producer once you have reporting experience. The second interview I did was with Ms. Katie Smith, Sports Anchor/ Reporter for WBOY in Clarksburg, WV, who reinforced this notion. She and I spoke for hours about how much she loved her job and I became certain that I would enjoy doing what she does. During these interviews I learned a lot about the television side of the sports industry. Both Katie and Mr. Smith told me that their hours were roughly 2:30pm to 11:30pm, which I was excited to hear as I am not a huge fan of early mornings. I also learned that it is a necessity to be outgoing in order to work in this field, regardless of whether you work in front of, or behind the cameras. Katie told me that there are a lot of egos in the

industry and they are seen in many coaches, athletes, and broadcasters alike, so it is very important to be the type of person who can get along with almost anyone. As much as she had to say about the rewarding side of the job, she also had plenty to add about the challenges of working in this field - especially as a woman. Katie told me that earning respect as a woman in the sports industry is a huge challenge. She said “you have to prove yourself and find a way to beat the stereotype; otherwise no one is going to take you seriously. And you have to have tough skin because everyone is going to think they can do your job better than you.” She also told me that sometimes she has to “bat her lashes” to get things done but that there is a very delicate balance between using the fact that you are a woman and exploiting it. I do not know if this was something I had hoped to hear but I loved that Katie was so open and realistic about everything with me. I think that knowing exactly what to expect and hearing it straight from someone who lives it every day will be very beneficial if I end up with this type of career.

As a Communication Studies major I have taken many courses in which I have learned valuable information that I am confident will be beneficial to me working as a sports reporter. Within the Communication Studies program some of these classes include Interpersonal Communication, Persuasion, and Intercultural Communication. In my pursuit of this liberal arts degree I have been required to take many courses outside of my major as well. Many of which have also taught me things that I will certainly be in need of daily as a sports reporter - including Effective Public Speaking, Professional Research and Reporting, and Electronic Media and Society.

The information I have taken from my interpersonal class has already had a huge impact on my work relationships at every job I have held up to this point. By applying all that I learned in that class to my every day experiences I have been able to understand people better, form relationships with individuals who I have almost nothing in common with, and learn a great deal from others who have had extremely different ideas than me. Each of these characteristics will certainly come in handy working in the sports field. I will be able to look past the “egos” Katie so knowingly spoke of and avoid unnecessary conflicts.

Persuasion is another Communication Studies course that has left me with a great deal of information that will be useful working in this field. When I spoke with Katie she mentioned to me that many interviews go one of two ways – you either find yourself attempting to drag information out of a person or desperately trying to get them to stop talking. In Persuasion I was taught how people are influenced and that, more often than not, these people do not even realize what is happening. I believe that with this knowledge I have already become a stronger influence on people in my day to day interactions and I know that this will be useful during difficult interviews. In addition, while learning the processes and theories of persuasion I feel that I became less susceptible to those who may attempt to lead me in a direction I do not want to go. I no longer take any information at face value and this knowledge is sure to keep me focused and on track no matter what.

The Intercultural course I took may very well end up being the most influential of these Communication Studies classes on my future career if I end up working for NBC in the Sports and Olympics department. In this field I will surely be communicating with many people from

cultures very different than my own on a daily basis. This will give me plenty of opportunities to put into practice the principles of Intercultural Communication. By focusing on mutuality and nonjudgmentalism I will be able to effectively establish relationships with any athlete or coach from outside my culture. I will also keep in mind the idea of Ethnocentrism and make a conscious decision not to use my own cultural norms to make generalizations of any of theirs. Thanks in large part to my summer job at Camp Woodward, I already have quite a bit of practice in doing these things and I know that as I learn about the industry I will only grow more fascinated by cultural norms different from my own.

The classes that I have taken outside of my major will also had a huge impact on my performance within my future career - Effective Public Speaking is certainly one of these. This class taught me how to hold the attention of others while delivering a message, as well as how to organize my thoughts in a way that would be easy for those listening to understand. If I am able to break into the field of sports reporting I will be using the tools I gained from this class every single day. When I first began making speeches and giving presentations I was very nervous being in front of people, but throughout the course I gained a great deal of confidence. Since taking this course I have delivered numerous speeches to all types and sizes of audiences and now the only times I find myself becoming nervous are the times I do not feel completely prepared. However, as a reporter I will be spending a great deal of time preparing for my interviews and broadcasts so I know that I will be able to relax and communicate effectively.

Yet another course that will directly influence my future career is Professional Research and Reporting. In this course my final assignment was to find a problem and come up with a

solution by creating my own research investigation and reporting it accordingly. I was able to create my own surveys, interview multiple individuals, and complete several types of observational research; all of which led me to a solution that was implemented by the Lake Norman YMCA, the company I was working for at the time. If I find myself working for the Sports and Olympics department of NBC I will be conducting research constantly. The sports world is ever evolving and new athletes are making their marks daily, it will be my job to find out who these up and coming athletes are and learn enough about them to be able to decipher whether or not they will be Olympic contenders or 'the next big thing' in sports.

Electronic Media and Society also taught me many things that I will use in my future career. This class placed a great deal of emphasis on the types of messages found on the internet, television, radio, and other types of electronic medium. This information will be beneficial to me in my future career because these are the very same types of messages I will be creating daily. In addition to learning about these messages and how to create them I also learned a great deal about the broadcasting industry. There were several chapters which touched on television markets, shield laws and ethical reporting. Although these points were not covered very in-depth, I was taught what they are all about and was able to gain an understanding of the basics.

During my interview with Katie I felt that I did not have the skills or knowledge to break into the field of sports anchoring/reporting. Because I just recently discovered that this is what I would like to pursue as a career, I have numerous gaps in my education. I chose last year to claim a minor in Sports Communication because I had thought about working in sports

production and believed that this would put me on the right track. However, I did not realize that the majority of those courses were only offered online or over the summer and I was unable to complete all the course work necessary. If I had made a decision about my future sooner I would have elected to minor in broadcasting or TV Journalism. Even though I will soon have a college degree I know that I still have much to learn about this field before I can effectively work within it. When I asked Katie what skills were needed for someone in this occupation she went on for quite a while about different types of cameras, camera techniques, broadcasting rules, and many other subjects I knew very little about. At first this was very daunting to me because I felt as though it would not be possible for me to learn all the information I was lacking before graduation. However, once I mentioned that to her, Katie told me that the moment I decide I want to intern at WBOY all I would need to do is email her and she will get me in.

So, this Spring I plan to become an intern at the station Katie works for. She told me that my internship would be what I make of it. Working with her I will have the opportunity to learn as much as I decide that I want to. Katie said I would be able to do absolutely everything with her and she would teach me all that I will need to know for a future in this field. She will stay late with me to make audition tapes, show me how to use the different types of cameras, and teach me everything I want to learn about any and every sport. This internship will be exactly what I need to get started in this exciting field and I cannot wait to take advantage of every opportunity presented to me.

While I may be lacking in many areas involved in this field, I believe that my degree in Communication Studies has laid the foundation for all that I am preparing to learn. In addition to all the courses I have taken that will directly apply to my future career plans, I have also had quite a bit of real life work experience in the sports field that will also prove valuable. At the age of fifteen I began coaching gymnastics classes in the gym where I was a competitive team member. It started with a once a week tumbling class but before I knew it I was coaching the pre-team, and very shortly after that I would come into the gym between my own practices and coach the lower level competitive girls. I believe that I have an enormous amount of knowledge when it comes to understanding the lives of serious athletes. I know what it is like to dedicate every aspect of your life to a sport. I know how it feels to spend Friday nights beating your body into shape, while everyone else your age is at a football game or dance, only to get up Saturday morning and do it all over again. I understand that in order for an athlete to make it to the Olympic level in any sport they have gone above and beyond their limitations more times than anyone could count. I love this life. I love dedication, determination, commitment, and hard work. There is nothing better than watching someone overcome an obstacle or accomplish a feat no one believed possible. Working in this field not only would I be able to witness such moments more often than ever, but this particular occupation would give me the opportunity, although in an entirely different way, to fulfill my own dream of experiencing the Olympics. I am convinced that working for NBC in this capacity is something I have been preparing for my entire life.

My entire college career has been just as unpredictable as every moment of the rest of my life. I am still trying to figure out how I wound up here doing what I am. I made many

decisions for reasons I am not completely clear on but I have learned that I am exactly where I belong and I am doing exactly what I am meant to. Although this life I am living now is a far cry from what I thought it would be by this time, I am much more than content with it. I have learned so many things that will apply directly to working in the sports industry and because of my sports background I believe that I can bring something to the table that no one else in the industry will have. My experiences, both in and out of school, have been unique. I am the only person who has had this life and I know that I will be able to impact many individuals in ways that others may be unable to. I am looking forward to working with Katie at WBOY this Spring and I cannot wait to see what will come from this amazing opportunity.