UNC-Charlotte Mass Media Alums Reflect On The Importance Of Internships In College

Landing that dream job after college isn’t easy. What many students don’t realize is that a black-and-white degree may not guarantee or promise a position in one’s dream career. In this day of age, employers EXPECT a recent graduate to have some relatable experience, rather than a degree. Employers want to hire a candidate they trust will already know the basic skills of the job, so they can THEN blossom and flourish to become a successful employer with those tangible skills. According to this Forbes article, being involved on campus and in internships are much more important to hiring managers than simply a degree or GPA.

Students in the Mass Media concentration can land jobs in Broadcast, Journalism, Advertising, Business, Editorial Writing, Event Planning, Public Information Officers, Public Relations, and many other careers. Mass Media is a very competitive industry where experience is highly recommended before graduation.

Below are five recent UNC Charlotte Communication Mass Media majors who utilized the Communication Internship Program and got hands-on-experience in their field. Some of these alums even landed their dream jobs, before even walking across the stage for graduation. These five UNC Charlotte alums are now making names for themselves in this competitive industry.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Libby Weihsmann
Communication Studies - Mass Media, Journalism Minor
2014 Graduate
Current Job: Reporter for the Carolina Panthers
Ideal Career: Anchoring for a national sports network

Where did you intern while being a student at UNC Charlotte?

WCCB, Charlotte’s CW affiliate and the Charlotte 49ers Athletic Department

How do you think these internships prepared you for your careers post-graduation?

WCCB was the first television news room I was able to work in. I knew I really wanted to work in sports, and working in a newsroom only confirmed that even more. I saw how reporters broke stories and how anchors created relationships with sources, which is something every reporter and anchor must do. While working with the athletic
Why do you think internships are crucial for Communication majors?

Internships are everything. Don't assume your internship will hire you (they most likely won't), but they do teach you a lot. Make sure it's an internship that you're going to get something out of. If you don't want to be a reporter, don't go intern for a television station. If you want to go into public relations, don't take a reporting internship. Be smart about the internship you're taking and don't just take one to say you took one. Network with the people you intern for because even if they can't hire you, maybe they know another company or place that can.

What was your favorite memory/part about being an intern at these companies?

While at WCCB, I didn't get to work with the sports department much. One of the sports anchors had to be on the Saturday evening show and there was a Charlotte Bobcats game going on, so he couldn't go shoot it. I got to go shoot my first NBA basketball game as an intern. I remember sitting on the baseboard trying to do my job and get the footage needed for the show, but thinking this was the coolest opportunity. While interning with the athletic department, I was the sideline reporter for the Charlotte-Wesley College game for American Sports Network. It was a nationally televised football game and it was a dream come true for me. I was so thankful for the opportunity, but it boosted my demo reel so much. I worked hard for the 49ers, and was extremely appreciative when they took a chance on me and asked me if I would report from the sideline.

What would you say to other students who are unsure if they should intern before they graduate?

I would tell a student that's unsure about interning before they graduate that they are bat s*** crazy for not doing it. How else are you going to network? Even if you learn about what you don't want to do in your career, you still learned something. It's a valuable opportunity to learn what it's like to be in a real work environment. You aren't the smartest person in the room, you aren't the best person in the room and you certainly don't know everything. Go intern, and then intern some more.

What is your biggest piece of advice for future UNC-Charlotte Communication Interns?

Do your homework on where you're interning. Make sure they can be flexible with your school schedule. Ask a lot of questions. Don't expect a job offer at the end of your internship. College can be nuts, but it's only for a few years. Work hard so you can play later.
Is there something you wish you knew about internships beforehand?

The people you intern with might not be able to help you get a job right away, but keep those relationships. They'll help you down the road if you're a proactive intern.

How did your internships help you network with people already in the field?

Networking is everything. Seriously. There's no such thing as networking too much. Knowing people already in your field is beyond helpful. They might know of a job opening before it's posted anywhere and let you know about it. I still communicate weekly with some of the people at WCCB. Network, network and network some more. It'll help you down the road more than you can imagine. My current job wasn't posted online anywhere. When I was working with the athletic department, I would be in every press conference after games. So were all of the local television stations and print reporters. I became friends with quite a few of them. One of them left local television and accepted a full-time position with the Panthers. I reached out to him asking if they were hiring. He gave me an email address to someone within the Panthers organization that might be able to help me. That email turned into a face-to-face meeting and that meeting turned into a job offer. Now that former television photographer is my coworker and together we just covered our first Super Bowl at the Super Bowl. Can we say bucket list? Network, y'all. You can never network enough.

If you would like to reach out to Libby Weihsmann you can email her at ejweihsmann@gmail.com

Kelly Pittman Jones
Communication Studies - Mass Media and English Major
May 2016 Graduate
Current Job: Producer for WMYA
Ideal Career: Sideline Reporter and/or News Reporter

Where did you intern while being a student at UNC-Charlotte?
Time Warner Cable Sports Channel, WWAY News Channel 3, and Country Music Television in Nashville Tennessee

How do you think these internships prepared you for your careers post-graduation?

They truly gave me post grad, real world experience. At my internships I was never treated like an intern, which really gave me all the work experience I would have encountered if I was an employee of their company.

Why do you think internships are crucial for Communication majors?


You truly are never prepared until you are in the field. Without internships, the first day of work would be so overwhelming if you had not been in similar situations before.

**What was your favorite memory/part about being an intern at these companies?**

My favorite part was never being treated as an intern. I was able to do sideline reporter, interview country music artist, and make my own packages that aired on TV. It was truly an incredible experience.

**What would you say to other students who are unsure if they should intern before they graduate?**

YOU HAVE TO! It shouldn't even be an option. I know from applying to jobs this past year that sometimes having three internships still wasn't good enough. Be sure to get as many as you can under your belt before it's too late.

**What is your biggest piece of advice for future UNC-Charlotte Communication Interns?**

Apply to every internship possible! The sky is the limit and you never know who will be reading your resume. It could be someone you have the craziest thing in common with and they would hire you just because of that crazy thing. Trust me, it's happened to me!

**Is there something you wish you knew about internships beforehand?**

Even if you are not getting paid, it's your job for the summer or the semester and treat it as though you are getting paid. Also, how you dress and present yourself goes a long way!

**How did your internships help you network with people already in the field?**

Every internship I have had, has led me either to a job or someone that recommended me for a job. Always be sure to reach out and get contact information when you meet new people at work!

**If you would like to reach out to Kelly Pittman Jones you can email her at kpittm15@gmail.com.**

---

**Genevieve Cordery**  
Communication Studies - Mass Media Major.  
Journalism & Women and Gender Studies Minor  
May 2015 Graduate  
**Current Job:** Social Media & Online Reputation Specialist @ Dominion Enterprises  
**Ideal Career:** Content Curator / Pro Blogger
Where did you intern while being a student at UNC-Charlotte?

I had an internship with Indie Chick Magazine.

How do you think these internships prepared you for your careers post-graduation?

It definitely helped me get my foot in the door. It also inspired me to start my own online magazine after my internship ended. When I started interviewing for jobs, my interviewers were always glad to hear that I already had experience. Most of these employers are looking for people with experience, even at entry-level positions.

Why do you think internships are crucial for Communication majors?

Communications is broad so it's important to start narrowing down your field so you can easily find the career you desire. When I started my job search, I found that many of these jobs that are posted online are just broad job titles, and the job descriptions were what I needed to look. I had three positions, with the same job title, but each job differed from one another.

What was your favorite memory/part about being an intern at these companies?

I liked that my bosses allowed me to work remotely and my hours were flexible. The best part of my internship was when my boss would invite me to the private Charlotte City Club and allowed me to mingle and network with like-minded individuals.

What would you say to other students who are unsure if they should intern before they graduate?

You should do your best to seek out an internship to gain that work/field experience. Think of an internship as gaining competitive advantage over another student who decides to do without an internship. An internship helps make yourself look great on paper, but you will also gain a lot of knowledge and experience from your mentors.

What is your biggest piece of advice for future UNC-Charlotte Communication Interns?

Learn as much as you can, network, and ask questions. Now is the time to gain as much knowledge as you can before you have to dive into your careers.

Is there something you wish you knew about internships beforehand?

I wished that there were more internships for students, and that they were more accessible to students who get trapped in Pre-Communication. I spent a year trying to find one and when I did, it was only for 6 months because it was time for me to graduate.
How did your internships help you network with people already in the field?

I got to meet a lot of really powerful women who inspired me to “do my own thing” and not care about old-school norms. Sometimes, the people who you network with can help you with more than just finding a job.

If you would like to reach out to Genevieve Cordery you can email her at genmcord@gmail.com

Shaquille Lord  
Communication Studies - Mass Media.  
JournalismMinor  
May 2016 Graduate  
Current Job: MultiMedia Journalist for WFXG FOX 54 News  
Ideal Career: Reporter/Anchor

Where did you intern while being a student at UNC-Charlotte?

I interned at UNC Charlotte Department of Communications, TWC News, and WCNC

How do you think these internships prepared you for your careers post-graduation?

It gave me daily responsibilities of an actual Reporter.

Why do you think internships are crucial for Communication majors?

Internships are VERY important because it gives you real experience. Nothing beats it no matter how many degree's you get.

What was your favorite memory/part about being an intern at these companies?

Interacting with people in my career field and seeing how they perform under deadlines.

What would you say to other students who are unsure if they should intern before they graduate?

Do it as a way to see if you want to choose that career path. Sometimes being an intern can give you realization that maybe you should choose a different path.

What is your biggest piece of advice for future UNC-Charlotte Communication Interns?
Biggest piece of advice would be to not rush it. Learn as much as you can and network every day. You'll be surprised by the people you know, that know other people.

Is there something you wish you knew about internships beforehand? That a lot of internships are NON-PAID.

How did your internships help you network with people already in the field?

It gave me face-to-face contact everyday with people in my career field.

If you would like to reach out to Shaquille Lord, you can email him at shaquillelord@gmail.com

Andrew James
May 2016 Graduate
Current Job: General Assignment Reporter at Alabama News Network
Ideal Career: Television News Reporter

Where did you intern while being a student at UNC-Charlotte?

Time Warner Cable News and WCCB Charlotte

How do you think these internships prepared you for your career post-graduation?

They gave me a taste of the TV news world and allowed me to meet and network with people in the business.

Why do you think internships are crucial for Communication majors?

Without internships students have no idea what the real work world and workload is like. There are many things that can't be taught in the classroom.

What was your favorite memory/part about being an intern at these companies?

My favorite memory is when my story ideas would get chosen and pursued by reporters. I also was very excited when my last internship transitioned into a part-time job.

What would you say to other students who are unsure if they should intern before
they graduate?

I would tell them to do it no matter what. That experience is so important and it will hurt you to not have taken advantage of it.

What is your biggest piece of advice for future UNC-Charlotte Communication Interns?

Go to your internship prepared.; ask questions.; do more than is asked of you; be willing to do it for free. (Both of my internships I worked close to 30 hours a week without getting paid.)

Is there something you wish you knew about internships beforehand?

No, I think it is best to go into internships open-minded so that you can soak up everything possible.

How did your internships help you network with people already in the field?

The big thing internships did was connect me to those people in the field. After that the networking wasn't hard at all.

If you would like to reach out to Andrew James, you can email him at amjames4444@gmail.com.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

It’s never too early to start researching and planning for an internship for next semester! UNC Charlotte is home to many resources for students such as The Career Center, Hire-A-Niner, and many our faculty in the Communication Department have connections to employers around the Charlotte community. Start looking now!

Nichole’s Tip: If you know the exact company or organization that you want to intern for, make yourself stand out by contacting the company or boss personally to see if they offer internships. Now make sure you have checked their website thoroughly first before reaching out, but if you don’t see something regarding internships then just don’t assume they don’t offer any. By reaching out to employers directly, that results in a more personal relationship with you and the employer. This is beneficial to the hiring process because they will remember your name, instead of those that simply applied through an online job application or interface. The employer will recognize and appreciate that you went the extra mile to find their contact information to reach out to them personally. This helps make a great first impression!