

By Lindsay Lorenz

This summer I interned at the *NorthEast Independent*, a small, weekly newspaper that oversees two towns. The *Independent* is a great place to work for a novice journalist because the staff is very friendly, and since it's only published once a week, you have the time to really perfect your craft – or in my case, work a part-time job.

Though I did not get paid for my internship, the experience I gained is quite valuable. Because the majority of my journalism experience has been through coursework and URI's student newspaper, getting out into "the real world" reinforced that working at a newspaper *is* what I want to do, and that I can handle it . . . and it goes to show that sometimes interns are assigned good stories, contrary to popular belief.

When I started I was nervous. My first stories were in towns that I had never even been to. I had seen their exit signs on the highway, but that's about it. So, instead of panicking, I looked at it like an adventure and it's this outlook that helped me get the most out of my time at the *Independent*. By the end of the summer, I could tell you how to get to every office, school and police station in the area, and I could also rattle off the names of many of the town's important public officials. Most importantly though, I became more comfortable interviewing people.

Looking at the syllabus and reading through course goals, I'm proud of the progress I made this summer. During the entire span of my internship I always did my best. As a result, I feel that I have met the goals well. I've discussed my progress more thoroughly below.

Course Goals

- *Be able to use job-seeking skills and resources, including published and Internet sources, to identify potential entry-level journalism jobs for yourself*

During the assignment in which we had to find a job and pretend to apply for it, I learned that finding a job can be a time-consuming process. However, knowing where to look (journalismjobs.com, job search engines, newspapers, networking, etc.) will definitely make the process easier. In addition, I know that if I have questions I can take advantage of help from my professors or Career Services.

- *Be able to write a cogent and coherent resume and cover letter to use for potential jobs in your field*

Before taking this class I had a vague idea of how to create a resume, and absolutely no idea how to write a cover letter. Writing a resume for the first time was, somewhat, a daunting task. This is not because I wasn't sure what to include, rather the formatting part became frustrating – *should I put a line here, do I italicize this, is a template a good idea?* But by the end of the summer, after a little trial and error, I felt more comfortable with the process. The handouts were a big help, too.

When it came to drafting my cover letter, I came up with a mental process in which I first looked at the job description and then considered what the employer was looking for in an ideal candidate. It wasn't too hard after that. In fact, when I see help wanted ads, lately I've able to analyze the description and make a quick mental list of what I would include in a cover letter. I know that when the real job search begins that I will be able to successfully write an appropriate cover letter and resume.

- *Be able to show written or taped accomplishments produced as part of your internship*

During my internship I wrote around 20 stories. Since the point of an internship is to gain experience in a particular job field, as I would write stories, I was always careful to make sure the piece was something I'd be proud to show during an interview. Because my work this summer will show my future employer what I'm capable of, I made sure I grabbed extra copies of my work to include in my portfolio.

- *Be capable of participating in an interview for an entry-level job in journalism*

The nice thing about being a journalist is that you eventually become comfortable talking to strangers – a helpful skill when it comes to job interviews that might have you feeling nervous. In fact, the interview process is pretty similar to a day's work. For example, before I interview someone for a story, I get a grasp on the focus of the story and then prepare a list of questions. For a job interview, I consider what my responsibilities are and then prepare a list of answers to likely questions. Though preparation is important, it's also valuable to know how to dress, how to behave, and how to negotiate a salary. I learned all of these skills this summer, and understand how they can impact the employer's decision whether or not to hire you.

- *Be able to discuss workplace issues, problems and solutions, including sexual harassment, professional misconduct, employee rights, obligations and benefits*

Luckily my internship went pretty smoothly. I didn't have any issues during the summer, but I know that if I had, I would be able to discuss the issue with my supervisor and find a solution. It's hard to say if my future supervisors will be as easygoing, but I feel that I am confident enough to confront my employer or co-worker if there is a problem.

- *Be able to communicate effectively with professionals in the workplace.*

It's very important to know how to communicate with your employers and co-workers. People appreciate phone calls when you think you're going to be late, e-mails when you've made progress, and when you are assertive, and speak intelligently, people respect you. I know that when I started my internship I was slightly intimidated, but I quickly realized that everyone in the office was pretty welcoming. It didn't take long before I realized that if I wanted to get the most out of my time at the Independent, that I'd have to interact with my co-workers. So I asked questions and always kept a friendly, professional attitude. I noticed that my co-workers returned the favor, too. When I start my next job, I'll know how to act and how to work with others.

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When I began this internship, I knew it was going to keep me busy. I also knew, that since it was unpaid, it would keep me poor. I took a job at a cleaning company that offered “flexible” hours, in hopes of financing some of this summer’s expenses. I quickly learned that flexibility meant short notice schedule changes and unpredictable hours. It was only a part-time job, but it became really hard to schedule interviews, and commit to assignments when I didn’t know if I’d be called into work. On top of that, I was also taking summer classes. I always got my work done, but I also created a lot of unnecessary stress for myself. Not that it would have changed anything, but I wish I would have known how time consuming interning, working and studying could be. If nothing else, I could have mentally prepared myself . . . or asked my parents for more money.

Either way, I feel that the classes I’ve taken at URI are responsible for my success this summer. I understand completely why students are required to take JOR 320 before starting an internship. As an intern, I covered a lot of municipal meetings, and the experience that I received in 320 was pretty much identical to the assignments I got at the paper. It was great going into a meeting and coming out knowing exactly what to emphasize in the story and who to talk to. All of the courses I’ve taken have come in hand at some point. For instance, the style rules I learned in 220 were essential when writing up the police and court blotters.

Though my paper didn’t have the technological capabilities to use mixed media like I learned in JOR 445, my instincts of what to record and feature as sound or video clips still kicked in. It’s a good feeling to know that my university is doing a good job preparing me for the future.

On my last day during a chat with my editor, I learned that one of my classmates is replacing me next semester. When I run into him, I’ll be sure to offer him some of the tips I picked up during my time there. The first things I will suggest is to make sure you really love writing and reporting. Otherwise, you’ll find yourself burnt out and frustrated. One of the biggest problems I ran into was time management. I would advise future interns to make a schedule, and make sure they complete their tasks on time. Aside from that, it’s always a good idea to get to know the people you work with. One of the women in the office even said she’d put in a good word for me with a newspaper she used to work for. My co-workers were all very friendly and, at many times, were willing to offer advice, help or even just driving directions to assignments – which brings me to my final suggestion: buy a GPS. If you’re covering a town you’re not too familiar with, this machine will be your best friend.

In conclusion, I know that what I’ve learned this summer will stay with me for the duration of my career. While there were some tough days this summer when I felt like I would never finish everything or people wouldn’t return my phone calls, I ultimately realized that I’ve picked a career I’ll enjoy. The best moment, however, came at the very end, when my editor told me that he would hire me if the newspaper needed more reporters. Though being a reporter can sometimes be stressful, there’s nothing like that rush after doing all the research and meeting so many people, and the pieces start coming together. For me, that makes it all worth it.