College radio curricula: Las Vegas general manager views

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COLLEGE RADIO CURRICULA: LAS VEGAS

GENERAL MANAGER VIEWS

by

Brad Leonard Weiss

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North Central College
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

College Radio Curricula: Las Vegas General Manager Views

by

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Radio continues to prosper in hundreds of different formats, with five radios on average in each American home, and over 10,000 radio stations in the United States. The key variables in the study of radio curriculum would seem to include: the specific classes that professionals believe would help students prepare for the radio industry; the theory/practical blend of course work; and the outside internship and professional programs available for students prior to entering the full-time radio job market.

The purpose of this study is to gather and assess radio station general managers' perceptions of the ideal radio curriculum. Since general managers in Las Vegas establish the standards required of entry level employees, interviewing a sample of six Las Vegas radio general managers will establish what is expected of college graduates who specialize in radio broadcast studies in a large radio market such as Las Vegas, Nevada, Arbitron rated market 40.

General managers interviewed for this study felt that college communication departments were doing an "adequate" job of preparing students or radio and asserted that college was usually unnecessary if employees had...
the right experience. General managers may not understand the overall goal of higher education, and their lack of understanding academia and the university structure may make them unqualified to evaluate radio broadcasting curricula.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The original Sears and Roebuck Catalog said, “If you don’t find it in the Index, look very carefully throughout the entire catalogue.” If anyone were to look throughout my “entire catalogue” of friends, family, teachers, and colleagues over the past 24 years, they would find the motivation behind this thesis.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

College students interested in radio broadcasting deserve the best possible educational curricula in order to learn more about the industry. This chapter is the prelude to a study designed to find available scholarship on radio broadcasting curricula, and gain the perspective of a variety of Las Vegas general managers on this subject to begin to identify what characterizes strong college radio broadcasting curricula. Chapter One will take a brief look at the history of radio, examine radio today, justify the need for this study, and review the debate surrounding radio broadcasting education.

The radio revolution started in the 19th century. In 1888 Heinrich Hertz provided the theoretical framework for manipulating radio waves and harnessing the electromagnetic spectrum. Hertz is honored to this day by the like of his name as the unit of measurement in radio wave nomenclature (Head and Sterling, 1990).

Guglielmo Marconi expanded Hertz's idea by realizing the potential of radio waves. Marconi, after years of experimentation, invented wireless communication that was used to transmit wireless messages across distances. These transmissions were short bursts used to signal Morse code and were not able to transmit speech (Head and Sterling, 1990). Reginald Fessenden discovered a way to provide a continuous broadcast signal that would allow for
speech to be modulated or transmitted using a vacuum tube oscillator. Others toyed with the idea of a vacuum tube that would allow for transmission, but Lee de Forest discovered the Audion tube that created energy for broadcast and increased the amplification and sensitivity of weak signals (Head and Sterling, 1990).

In 1906, Fessenden made the first known sound radio transmission using an early telephone and an alternator that created radio energy. Fessenden's broadcast led to a series of demonstrations that would set the stage for regular broadcast services by 1920 (Head & Sterling, 1990).

In 1920, the first significant form of radio journalism occurred when Pittsburgh's station KDKA broadcast an 18-hour marathon focusing on the Harding-Cox presidential election returns from the roof of the Westinghouse building on November 2, 1920 (Carpini, p. 23, 1993). Westinghouse sold radio receivers to the general public, and KDKA, which was started by Westinghouse, transmitted from the Westinghouse factory in Pittsburgh (Head and Sterling, 1990).

In 1926, Owen Young and David Sarnoff of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) created the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) after they agreed to rent the network of stations owned by AT&T. The next year Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting System (CBS) was started by an independent talent-booking agency. William S. Paley bought CBS' 22 affiliates in September, 1928. Paley started network programs that were broadcast by affiliates. For example, a newscast could be broadcast from New York to all 22 affiliates. Today, network broadcasting through affiliate stations is once again an important and profitable trend in radio broadcasting (Head and Sterling, 1990).

Also in 1928, advertising agencies started programming radio stations. The main reason for agency design was to include sponsorships for advertising
clients (Head and Sterling, 1990). Sponsorships would evolve into new commercial broadcasting ideas, including the standard 30 and 60 second commercial radio advertisements used today.

In 1933, Edwin Armstrong explored alternative electromagnetic spectrum space for programming with frequency modulation (FM) (Head and Sterling, 1990). The popularity of radio broadcasting came into focus in 1939 when CBS, in association with the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), wanted to demonstrate the importance of the radio medium in areas like politics. CBS radio aired a program called "Seems Radio Is Here to Stay" to emphasize the importance of radio as an established medium. The program was a public relations effort to demonstrate the power of the medium and "give the audience a gentle tap on the shoulder" (Watson, 1993, p. 186; Lazarsfeld and Kendall, 1948).

Radio Today

Sixty years have passed since "Seems Radio Is Here To Stay" aired. Since then FM stereo has been added, AM stereo has been revamped, and digital audio broadcasting has become the center of attention (Matelski, 1993). Radio certainly has made its mark with programs like the early radio dramas, critical coverage of World War II, and music broadcasts into the homes of millions since the 1939 CBS piece aired (Watson, 1993). Not only has radio technology advanced, but radio programmers must now keep up with advancements in hundreds of different formats. There are more than five radios on average in each American home. "Radio helps us decide what to wear in the morning and which route to take to work" (Watson, p. 196, 1993).

The FCC reports that there are over 10,000 radio stations, or almost 10 radio stations for every U.S. television station. The top 25 radio groups own

While radio has been overlooked in the communication discipline and had its listenership condensed due to the development of television, the period from the 1950s to the 1990s saw a pattern of niche programming and local market identity that helped maintain radio as a successful media vehicle (Matelski, 1993). The revenue generated by the listener base of radio suggests that it is an important area of study. In 1998, radio sales totaled $15.41 billion between local, national, and network sales. The top 25 radio groups’ revenue was $7.6 billion (Rathbun, 1999).

Many media professionals, including Eric Rhoads, publisher of Radio Ink, think that radio is taken for granted in today’s society. Part of the reason for this might be due to other forms of journalism, television, and the Internet. In fact, radio still carries an important political and social history and “remains a critical source of information and important stimulus for public discourse” (Carpini, p. 35, 1993).

Additionally, the radio medium is being redefined. There will soon be an unlimited number of “radio” stations broadcasting on the Internet using new technology such as RealNetworks G2 and QuickTime (Beacham, 1999).
Study of Radio

Academic study in journalism and mass communication is most often associated with television and newspaper practices. Despite the existence of 10,504 U.S. radio stations, many of which have reported the greatest historical events to millions of listeners, radio seems to be the forgotten medium in the academic communication discipline. Currently, the Journal of Radio Studies is the only refereed journal devoted exclusively to radio studies.

Journalism and mass communication education (which included print initially, and then radio and television) in the United States dates back to the 1700s. The four periods of journalism and mass communication education are: the 1700s to the 1870s, the 1870s to the 1920s, the 1920s to the 1950s, and the 1950s to the present (Weaver and Gray, 1979).

In the first period, the course of early journalism and mass communication education in general advanced from early apprentice programs to formal study in colleges and universities in the second period (Weaver and Gray, 1979). The second period from the 1870s to the 1920s was not only a time when students learned how to report news, but also a time when colleges and universities were trying to develop radio as a medium. It was during this period that radio adopted a special public responsibility which emphasized broadcasting in the public interest (Head and Sterling, 1990).

Professional programs developed “on a firmer basis” during the 1920s to the 1950s. Weaver and Gray (1979) asserted that journalism/mass communication progressed from historical studies to behavioral science studies during this third period. Instead of examining what was happening on-the-air, students examined why they were happening.

In the final period, 1950 to the present, more doctoral programs in journalism and mass communication have been established. Research on the
effects of mass media has been the most dominant form of research since the 1950s, with the introduction of television increasing the level of research funding in journalism and mass communication (Weaver & Gray, 1979). While cable television continues to develop, the Internet, by natural extension, is now the center of attention for many students and faculty.

Justification

The importance of radio is not only overlooked by society, but it is also overlooked by academia. Watson (1993), a telecommunications professor at Eastern Michigan University, argues:

Too often radio is treated perfunctorily in college media courses as the obligatory unit that precedes television. But the exploration of radio’s dramatic history and its profound contemporary functions is critical to true understanding of how the media have changed what it means to be human. (Watson, p. 196, 1993)

Despite radio revenues soaring due to sponsorship and advertising, colleges and universities in general do not reinforce the importance of radio broadcasting. Radio is continually linked with the general heading of journalism and mass communication. Additionally, the continued success of radio has not been matched by educational systems in the United States according to Norman Pattiz, past president of the Broadcast Education Association (BEA). Pattiz was concerned with the lack of nationally known radio curricula in colleges and universities:

If you’re a student and you want to study film, or you want to study television or go into journalism, you can think of a dozen major universities around the country that have nationally know programs in those areas. But if you want to go and study radio, nothing comes to
mind. We should do what we can to expand the (radio) gene pool.
(Pattiz, p. 25, 1996)

Pattiz added that college radio curricula development was needed because it would help to ensure the future of the radio industry (Pattiz, 1996). His concern seems appropriate since the future of radio seems bright based on its resilience, market-sensitivity, cost effectiveness, and profitability. Pattiz wanted colleges and universities to focus on the study of radio broadcasting. In addition, Watson (1993) felt that scholars needed to teach, research and write specifically about radio broadcasting to help develop the industry.

Frank Chorba, editor of the Journal of Radio Studies, wrote that there is a "limited body of information regarding radio curriculum" because "few institutions teach a specific radio sequence." He added, "Usually it is integrated with other areas of broadcasting and cable" (F.J. Chorba, personal communication, September 15, 1999).

The Debate Within the Academy

In addition to a lack of curricular focus on radio education, Blanchard (1988) mentioned that, "The potential and actual role of journalism/mass communication programs is underappreciated by media professionals" (p. 28). Blanchard based this statement on comments directed at him as a journalism and mass communication administrator since 1966 (Blanchard, 1988). While Blanchard defended journalism and mass communication programs in a commentary on the emerging role of journalism and mass communication in liberal and media studies, Corrigan, a professor and newspaper editor, was critical in a commentary on journalism programs saying, "Academia is out of touch with the needs of the news industry" (Corrigan, 1993, p. 34). Corrigan (1993) made this statement because he saw "only a minute portion of the
research papers (that were presented at the 1993 Association for Journalism and Mass Communication convention) dedicated to finding ways of improving skills of students seeking sinecure in the field of journalism" (p. 44).

Blanchard and Corrigan are both professors in journalism/mass communication, yet both wrote distinctly different commentaries explaining how college and university journalism and mass communication programs served the news industry. The difference might be attributed to the fact that Blanchard is a former president of the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication, while Corrigan was editor-in-chief of two suburban weeklies in Saint Louis, Missouri, prior to being a journalism professor.

Despite Blanchard's defense of journalism and mass communication in academia, he felt that there should be an integration of practical communication with theoretical communication concepts. He thought there were too many different emphases in journalism and mass communication curricula (Blanchard, 1988).

In 1989, the AEJMC Curriculum Task Force examined journalism and mass communication programs around the country and analyzed articles dating back to 1982. The task force reported that media education needed to teach practicality as well as "philosophical" concepts in skill oriented courses (AEJMC, 1996). Dennis and DeFleur (1991) suggested classes such as media influence on society and media economics.

On the other side of the spectrum, Corrigan (1993) felt that journalism schools needed to focus on teaching basic skills to students. These skills included basic writing, reporting and editing. He mentioned that only a few research papers at a 1993 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) convention focused on helping students improve skills to help their careers.
An AEJMC Broadcast Task Force found that many broadcast educators believed that graduating students had well-rounded practical skills in areas such as broadcast production, while writing was the weakest skill on the part of new graduates (1989). The task force found that broadcast educators felt internships were important, and a majority of educators thought that an academic minor would enhance broadcast journalism education. The AEJMC report went on to mention a Roper Organization survey of media executives. Most executives (91%) felt that there needed to be a stronger link between universities and broadcasting companies. Industry professionals recommended that “universities should grant leaves to faculty to work in the broadcasting and cable industries” (AEJMC, 1989, p. A-13). Many executives were also unhappy with the writing skills of new graduates (AEJMC, 1989).

Bales also recognized a debate between educators and professionals in the field of journalism and mass communication, and recommended the following to improve relations between news professionals and educators: productive internship programs, guest lecture series, and workshops where professionals and educators exchange ideas (Bales, 1992).

In response to Corrigan’s earlier concerns, the task force reported that charges by media professionals and communication educators that the discipline was “too practical or too theoretical are unwarranted, but need to be addressed” (AEJMC, 1996, p. 102). Regarding Blanchard, who complained about the overabundance of communication curriculum emphases (i.e., broadcasting, journalism, television, radio, etc.), the AEJMC Task Force agreed: “The strength of journalism and mass communication education is its diversity and that no one curriculum can meet the needs of all units” (AEJMC, 1996, p. 102). Basically, the task force endorsed the notion that grouping television, radio, and other parts of journalism and mass communication together was efficient.
Dickson and Sellmeyer (1992) discussed two important studies: the Oregon Report (1984) and the Mullins Report (1987). They noted that the Oregon Report (1984) suggested that schools should move away from industry-oriented sequence programs and become more generic, while the Mullins Report (1987) discouraged an industrial-based career track curriculum for students. Essentially, the two studies recommended that journalism programs should have an integrated curriculum, with practical journalism preparation and theoretical learning from other disciplines (Dickson and Sellmeyer, 1992).

Durham (1992) contended that teachers and students often went in two different directions. Durham thought that students expected practical information, while faculty approached the curriculum from a research-driven perspective. Durham suggested that there needed to be salience in the classroom. His example was a news-editorial classroom focused on management, in which students could raise questions about intradepartmental interaction in journalism and mass communication related industry settings (Durham, 1992). Durham pointed to a trend later discussed by Katula and Threnhauser (1999).

Even in our own field of communication, there is no denying the obvious trend toward the production and telecommunication side of the curriculum and away from the study of rhetorical theory often because students see these former pursuits as project-and skills-based rather than as simply conceptual. (Katula & Threnhauser, 1999, p. 239)

Despite student interest in practicality, Medsger (1996) found that more and more journalism educators were being hired based on their doctoral degree (research degree), rather than their journalism experience (Medsger, 1996). Which is more important, the degree, or the experience? Of new
journalists, 57% said that their best journalism instructor had extensive professional journalistic experience and no doctoral degree (Medsger, 1996).

Purpose

Returning to the purpose of this study, which was previously stated, it is essential to gain perspectives from general managers and to explore the connection between local industry and college/university radio curricula. Specifically, this study will focus on general manager perceptions of college and university radio curricula. The remainder of this study is organized into four chapters: chapter two will review related literature, chapter three will describe the interviewing method to be used in this study, chapter four will establish the findings of the interviews, and finally, chapter five will summarize the entire thesis and make recommendations for the future.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON RADIO CURRICULA

This chapter reviews the different views on radio curricula. First, chapter two will review the academic discussion of a practical/theoretical curriculum balance. Second, job preparation for radio broadcasting will come into focus. Third, chapter two will look at college radio curricula and experiential education. Fourth, specific curricular areas of on-air performance, radio history, and radio drama will be examined. Finally, a summary of all the elements included in chapter two will be presented.

Curriculum Debate

Duhe and Zukowski (1997) provided a solid description of the debate in radio-television journalism curriculum. On one side of the argument are advocates of a skill-oriented system that is most similar to trade school techniques. On the other side of the debate are “advocates of a broad-scoped liberal arts education” (p. 4). The combination of hands-on application and study of liberal arts is addressed by Duhe and Zukowski (1997) and Lind and Danowski (1999). Additionally, Dickson and Sellmeyer (1992) wanted to examine the current status of journalism and mass communication. Dennis and DeFleur (1991) explored the connection between journalism and mass communication and other academic areas.
Studies of Curriculum Balance

Duhe and Zukowski (1997) conducted a survey of 60 academics and 260 television news directors. The authors wanted to know whether students should take more skill-oriented courses in journalism and mass communication, or focus their attention on subjects like philosophy and history. The authors mentioned that earlier studies showed some criticism of broadcast journalism education by industry professionals. Duhe and Zukowski (1997) wanted to find out what types of programs colleges required students to go through in broadcast journalism, discover what educators and industry professionals thought was the most appropriate curriculum balance, and determine which curriculum would help students succeed in the broadcast news industry. Using two similar questionnaires for academics and TV news directors, respondents chose from five possible types of curricula: the capstone semester, which included a five-day-a-week television news laboratory with 12 hours of television news laboratory experience, a one-day-a-week television news laboratory experience, a liberal-arts/journalism major with no hours of intensive television news laboratory experience, liberal-arts/journalism course work with only 15 hours of journalism courses and no laboratory experience, or the classic liberal arts curriculum. The results indicated that a majority of TV news directors and academics agreed that the capstone semester, which included the most television laboratory experience, was the best type of curriculum to prepare successful broadcast journalists. Duhe and Zukowski (1997) found that both hands-on application and liberal arts studies were crucial for the well-rounded broadcast journalism education. This study only examined the television portion of broadcast news. Still many broadcast news programs train students for both television and radio broadcast formats (Duhe and Zukowski, p. 14, 1997).
Similarly, Dickson and Sellmeyer (1992) wanted to determine if journalism and mass communication programs were moving toward an integrated curriculum. Dickson and Sellmeyer’s (1992) study found that college journalism and mass communication programs were becoming all encompassing, covering theoretical and practical issues in all forms of media in a single program. The authors surveyed 380 heads of journalism and mass communication programs and determined that “the trend toward a holistic curriculum is gathering momentum” (p. 35).

An article by Dennis and DeFleur (1991) discussed the holistic task of teachers and students, linking journalism and mass communication to other academic areas, while still maintaining practicality. The authors suggested several topics and textbooks that might help students understand how mass communication is related to other fields. Some of the topics included: media economics, media influence on society, and media influence on individuals.

Lind and Danowski (1999) examined 303 completed broadcaster surveys and 341 educator surveys, comparing characteristics media managers and educators believed were good classroom exercises for entry level employees. They also looked at what was needed for promotion beyond the entry level position and examined if educators were effectively preparing students for entry-level positions. When rating the success of entry-level employees, broadcasters were more interested in computer skills than educators, while educators focused on production skills. Educators were more concerned with writing skills than broadcasters. There was much overlap between what educators and broadcasters thought was needed for promotion beyond entry-level positions, with both groups emphasizing skill development from employees. Broadcasters pointed more to personal qualities, while educators commented more on employee communication skills. Lind and Danowski’s
(1999) findings about how educators and broadcasters felt led them to call for more collaboration between broadcasters and educators on the following issues: writing, production, internships, liberal arts education, critical thinking, creativity, work ethic and personality, faculty development, and department advisory committees. Lind and Danowski (1999) added that, “Broadcasters are less likely than educators to see educators as effective in preparing students” (p. 2-3).

College Radio Curricula

Shelton, Lane, and Waldhart’s (1999) critique examined national trends in communication education, and college and university “employment” of those trends in the curriculum. Trends included growing computer technology, more interaction between faculty and students (possibly via webpages, faculty-generated electronic newspapers, and listservs), and the need to “use information technology creatively” (p. 229-232).

The authors pointed to three dominate trends: interactive teaching/learning with experiential education, emphasis upon employment of groups or teams, and the escalating use of computer technology (Shelton, Lane, and Waldhart, 1999).

Using advanced computer technology in radio broadcasting education with advanced digital equipment is extremely expensive. Sauls (1997) reinforced that choosing radio equipment for a radio program/station is an important decision because of the general lack of college funds. One university professor’s experience (endorsed by professional studio producers) is that learning digital concepts, while working hands on with analog equipment, is more important than learning a specific digital platform.

College and university radio stations often have problems with funding that limit their ability to expand educational capabilities. Sauls (1995) found that
station objectives mirrored college/university predictors of selected factors which affect the funding of such noncommercial stations. Station directors and college/university personnel thought that the college radio station was an integral part of the academic program that made the school part of the community. Both station managers and college personnel felt that this was a significant predictor of funding for the campus radio station.

Experiential Education

Today students not only work with radio equipment on campus, but experiential education is a trend in journalism and mass communication education. Experiential education includes non-traditional educational experiences such as cooperative education, study abroad programs, internships, and service-learning which have been developed to help students educational well-roundedness (Katula and Threnhauser, 1999).

Williams (1993) determined that cooperative education helped with learning in communication curriculum in general since students had the chance to work hands-on in job situations in most cases. Two positive outcomes resulted from the cooperative education experience: (1) co-op students displayed more practical job knowledge than non-co-op students, and (2) co-op students displayed more general “tacit knowledge” than non-co-op students (Williams, 1993, 32-55).

Katula and Threnhauser (1999) expressed that there is little empirical evidence that suggested study abroad programs helped students in communication studies with conceptual understanding. Reflection and perspective might be the best things acquired through study abroad programs according to the authors.

As mentioned earlier, Bales (1992) felt that improved relations between news professionals and educators was positive. Productive internships,
guest lecture series', and workshops where professionals and educators exchange ideas may be revolutionary ideas for colleges and university mass communication and journalism programs.

On-Air Performance

Shields (1992) focused on education that taught students ways to obtain a fresh viewpoint to improve on-air performance, the usual entry into broadcasting. Students should understand the theater of the mind they are creating for listeners. Shields stressed the importance of understanding creative announcing styles. Some areas that Shields (1992) thought were important to students included learning creative skills like brainstorming and visualization, along with developing a critical listening ear. Developing outside interests beyond radio was also important. Outside interests are linked to having another major or minor besides journalism or mass communication.

Radio History

Kock, Kang, and Allen (1999) surveyed 112 two-year colleges and 100 four-year schools to understand the status of broadcast education in two-year schools and four-year schools. Kock, Kang, and Allen (1999) found that most broadcast programs combined theoretical and practical learning to prepare students for broadcast employment. The authors felt that educators needed to take steps to gain further acceptance from outside disciplines. Communication theory, media law/ethics, broadcast history, and sales/marketing were weak areas in broadcast curricula.

Part of the Kock, Kang, and Allen (1999) study found that broadcast history was an undeveloped area of broadcast education in general. Specific to radio, Russell (1995) described both the history of radio and radio and society as important areas for development. Russell added that students need to
understand the historical significance of media and the changing role of each media within different communities: geographical and historical communities. Students need to understand the significance of radio, and the changes it has went through.

Additionally, Kock, Kang, and Allen (1999) found that a “universal broadcasting curriculum would be problematic” because it would “force broadcast educators to agree upon the integral components of the broadcasting curriculum, while still meeting a diversity of interests” (p. 14-15).

Radio Performance and the Radio Drama

Ryland (1978) suggested that an effective broadcast education should get students to perform professionally in broadcast situations with a minimum of guidance. To do this, class assignments should include either activities similar to commercial work or on-the-job experiences at the campus or local commercial radio station(s). The possibilities for such activities and experiences include producing radio dramas in class or developing advertising programs for potential clients.

Ryland’s radio drama idea is not dated or impractical. In fact, the College Marconi Awards recognize the top college technical production each year as part of an awards ceremony. College radio dramas are eligible to win this award.

The radio drama seems to be an underused type of radio preparation that demonstrates creative and technical production methods. Radio theater production can either be classical, using only one take, or modern, using technical production equipment and combining technical knowledge to create a more ideal product. With modern production, there are multiple takes and a post-production process similar to film post-production. This process helps
students learn more about radio production while expanding theater of the mind and creativity/brainstorming (West, 1997).

Review

The Duhe and Zukowski (1997) study of career preparation and first jobs focused on television. They pointed out that “a similar [curriculum] study concentrating on the best type of curriculum to train students for the radio news industry or on the radio skills gained in various types of curriculum would benefit students, broadcast journalism programs and the radio news industry” (p. 14). The Duhe and Zukowski study focused on “news” rather than broadcasting in general.

Dickson and Sellmeyer (1992) determined that “the trend toward a holistic curriculum is gathering momentum” (p. 35) in journalism and mass communication, but Dennis and DeFleur (1991) suggested specific topics such as media economics and media influence on society to help students understand how mass communication is related to other fields. These two studies failed to focus specifically on radio broadcasting and its relationship with other fields. This might be due to the circumstances earlier described by Chorba (1999): “Few institutions teach a specific radio sequence. Usually it is integrated with other areas of broadcasting and cable” (F.J. Chorba, personal communication, September 15, 1999). Most of the mass communication and journalism studies do not focus specifically on radio studies or radio curriculum issues.

Lind and Danowski (1999) found that educators and broadcasters needed to work together more and focus on writing, production, internships, liberal arts education, critical thinking, creativity, work ethic and personality, faculty development, and department advisory committees. All of these areas are strong variables that should be looked at in relation to radio broadcasting. Lind and Danowski’s (1999) finding that many educators are not seen as effective in
preparing students for careers in broadcasting is another interesting area to examine.

Shelton, Lane, and Waldhart (1999) pointed out that experiential education, group work, and computer technology were three dominate trends in communication education. Again, specifically looking at these three areas and their relationship with radio broadcasting is essential.

Katula and Threnhauser (1999) and Williams (1993) mentioned that cooperative education, study abroad programs, internships, and service-learning can all add to the student experience in communication education. Bales (1992) focused specifically on the relationship between news professionals and educators and the development of this collaboration. Further examination of the guest lecture series idea and internship programs for colleges and universities is necessary.

Shields (1992) wrote about the importance of student development in other areas outside of radio in order for them to obtain a fresh viewpoint to improve on-air performance. Shields (1992) unfortunately did not explore how practitioners felt the educational system could develop better on-air performers.

Kock, Kang, and Allen (1999), and Russell (1995) looked at a vital part of radio broadcasting and radio history. Kock, Kang, and Allen (1999) described how broadcast history was an undeveloped area in mass communication in general, and Russell (1995) singled out radio and the historical importance of the medium. The authors also mentioned that communication theory, media law/ethics, broadcast history, and sales/marketing were weak areas in mass communication curricula. Additional research may look at what specific classes are needed in radio broadcasting curricula. Russell (1995) also added that radio and society and understanding the significance of radio was important.
Ryland (1978) and West (1997) were both interested in the performance aspect of radio. Ryland (1978) felt that on-the-job experience was essential. Additional research might look at how students can obtain on-the-job training while in college, or get their first radio job.

West (1997) expanded on the radio drama idea mentioned by Ryland. West (1997) felt that students should perform radio dramas to help further the creative process. The creative development process needs to be examined further.

Based on previous research, the key variables in the study of college radio curriculum would seem to include: the specific classes that professionals believe would help students prepare for the radio industry, the theory/practical blend of course work, and the outside internship and professional programs available for students prior to entering the full-time radio job market. Additionally, the significance of radio history along with production/on-air performance requirements for undergraduate students interested in radio should be considered.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to gather and assess radio station general managers' perceptions of the ideal radio curriculum. Academians and radio practitioners might agree or disagree that the perfect program based on preliminary research identified in this study would include: a practical and theoretical blend of courses that relate radio broadcasting to other fields, working with new technology, specifically digital equipment, experiential education programs, on-air performance courses, and radio history studies.

Exploring how radio practitioners, specifically radio general managers, feel about radio broadcasting curriculum is the next logical step due to the rapid change in the radio industry and the need for fresh input from an industry viewpoint prior to faculty dialogue within college radio/journalism and mass communication departments. General managers are important because they will be deciding if students will make quality employees and make hiring decisions based on their conclusions.

Market and Sample

General managers determine the working standards for employees. In terms of this study, Las Vegas, Nevada, provides a perfect setting to discover what local radio general managers think are necessary components of the ideal radio broadcasting curriculum.
Las Vegas has 24 Arbitron rated stations (The Arbitron Company, 1999) and 10 non-Arbitron rated stations. They include:

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Others

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Additionally, Las Vegas radio revenues continue to skyrocket. Las Vegas’ 1999 radio revenue was over $75 million. Since 1993, Las Vegas revenues have grown, on the average, 19.3% annually (Miller Kaplan Reports, 1999). Along with increased revenue, radio systems continue to develop in Las Vegas.

CBS/Infinity, the largest radio system in Las Vegas, now owns six radio stations, including: KLUC-FM, KMXB-FM, KMZQ-FM, KXTE-FM, KFNS-AM, and KXNT-AM. Las Vegas general managers oversee hundreds of people who generate millions of dollars for owners and stock holders.

This study will examine how Las Vegas radio group general managers from large and small cluster radio groups feel about radio curricula. A general set of interview elements for each interview is provided in Appendix A.
Taylor and Bogdan (1984) described the in-depth interview as:

...face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words. (p. 77)

For this study, informants are Las Vegas general managers. An attempt was made via telephone to contact and schedule appointments with all Las Vegas general managers. After interviews are arranged with a range of group general managers, follow-up information will be sent describing the approximate thirty minute time frame needed to conduct the interview. Appointments will be scheduled, and each general manager will be interviewed using the set of interview elements (Appendix 1). Because the organizational framework of stations varies, the list of discussion elements is best described as a tool to guide the interview, not a complete script of questions. Interviews will be audio taped with permission for accuracy.

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) described the interview situation as the atmosphere created by the interviewer. Essentially, the interviewer sets the stage for the interview.

The elements that are part of each interview can be comparable to those included in Spradley's (1979) description of the ethnographic interview: developing a rapport with the informant, explaining the purpose of the interview, directing the interviewee through a series of topics (Appendix 1) while allowing for open discussion and probing, restating what was discussed, creating hypothetical situations, and asking friendly questions before taking leave (Spradley, 1979).

Probing, as Spradley (1979) indicated, allows the researcher to focus on important issues raised. Everyday workplace examples and "what if" scenarios
are part of using hypothetical examples in the interview. Follow-up phone interviews will also be part of the investigation.

Analysis Plan

After describing the findings of these interviews, this study will review general managers' views and make conclusions about radio broadcasting curriculum development in colleges and universities.

The data collected will be described in chapter four according to categories described in chapter two, and other domains. Domain, as stated by Spradley (1979), is any other category "in which members share at least one feature of meaning" (p. 100). This could include general managers' interest in responding to open-ended questions in terms of their various departments in their respective organizations. However, Spradley's (1979) notion of domain goes further and relates to those concepts, frames, and schema to which general managers refer. In this case, general managers may mention traits or qualities such as drive, focus, and energy when describing employees. These "domains" will be presented in chapter four, guided by the elements that were discussed in chapter two.

After describing the findings of these interviews in chapter four, chapter five will summarize those findings, put them into context, and make recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Documentation in chapter four corresponds with a method used by Traudt (1993), developed by Nelson (1989). The scheme included a unique number assigned to each subject, identification of the A or B side of the audiocassette, and the digital counter number. For example, the data citation “5A391” indicates a transcription item from subject five, side A of the audiocassette, at digital marker 391. (Traudt, p. 61, 1993)

Availability, willingness to be interviewed, and correspondence dictated that six Las Vegas general managers representing 19 stations be interviewed between November 2, 1999 and November 18, 1999. The average interview lasted 35 minutes. Data from the interviews were analyzed by reviewing the taped audiocassettes several times. This review process included identifying themes and recurring comments across interviewees.

The six general managers interviewed included one with an associates degree (Accounting), three with undergraduate degrees (Speech/Communication, Industrial Management, and History/English), one with some college experience and a certificate from a broadcasting school (one year radio trade school), and one with some college experience studying law. All six moved into the general manager position through the sales route. Incidentally, one was an operations manager/program director before moving into sales and becoming a general manager.
“Getting the Business”: The Importance of Radio Sales

Five of the six general managers had sales staffs numbering more than eight within their group or single station. The general manager in the small sales staff situation acknowledged that this station was probably the first radio sales job for the staff members at this radio station (1A168). In this case, the sales associates, who were also heavily involved with the on-air product, had responsibilities beyond luring clients to advertise with this station(s). Sales associates “must understand selling and programming” (1A175).

Everyone from the board-operators to the sales staff is responsible for getting out whatever message our clients want to get out, whether it’s an advertising message, political or social issue that they want to express. (1A205)

Here, sales staff members usually did not come right out of college and into sales. Most were involved with other areas of radio and moved into sales after a variety of radio experiences. The example used was a full-time sales member who went to a commercial broadcasting school in North Carolina, interned at a rock station in North Carolina, got involved with programming and sales, and then moved into sales with this company in Las Vegas (1A222).

Incidentally, upon mentioning this example, the interviewee quickly pointed out that, “I think anyone successful in (radio) sales needs to understand the programming side of the business” (1A224). The general manager added, “You have to have a broad based knowledge. You need to be able to do more than just make the sale. You need to understand what (product) you are talking about, and how that program on (the station) is going to work for the client.” (1A227)

The connection between sales and programming was also described by another general manager who mentioned that an increasing number of sales
staff members attend the same seminars as programmers. Referring to the development of new ideas and programs, the interviewee commented, "Business from the programming end is becoming a big buck part of the business" (4A205).

Additionally, the first general manager brought up "having a mindset or drive to win someone over" (1A238). Description of this mindset or drive to win and subsequent comments melded with ideas expressed by the other five general managers who described successful sales associates: "Good sales includes understanding the creative process, and then (sales associates) must combine that with the drive" (6A170). "In sales, you have creativity plus desire. You've just got to get the business" (6A229).

The follow-up comments on the subject of "getting the business" pointed to the idea that radio was a different type of product. "It is important for sales people to understand how radio works in the mind, as people listen to it, and be able to sell that to clients" (6A110). "A radio sales job is different from most sales jobs because you are selling an intangible product...it may be hard for clients to understand the value of radio" (5A60).

In the instance of the general manager who first raised the idea of a certain sales "mindset", further explanation described this mindset or drive as something used to win a client over and sell advertising that "may come from experience, inventing new things for the radio station, and developing new programs. This creative mindset is fine tuned with experience" (1A246). One participant connected drive with having goals, as did other participants. "Sales people are self motivated, creative, and have financial goals. Goal oriented would describe the makeup of a strong sales person" (4A140).
A variety of general manager comments distinguished the radio sales associates. “High energy level is usually really good. Radio has a faster pace than TV, TV is faster than print” (3A124).

Another general manager brought up “taking on challenges” as a radio sales associate. “We like people who are heat seekers, we like people that don’t run from challenges” (4A150).

Somewhat contradicting earlier comments made during the interview, the second general manager came back and said, “I don’t think there are any identifiable traits of sales people, across the board.” (2B100) This general manager quickly followed up by saying,

Well, maybe two: good people...with a high level of empathy...they know their client’s needs and they know how to fulfill those needs. The ideal sales person is bright, but empathy is important. You need to know how to connect with your prospect, and feel what they are feeling. You have to be able to read their little nuances, to get them to like you. So good people, high level of empathy. (B111)

After roaming through a discussion regarding these aforementioned “traits”, one general manager expanded into a discussion on training sales associates. "If you have those personal skills (self motivated, creative, with financial goals), we can train you" (4A148). Another general manager made numerous comments about in-house training for sales. For this company, they were willing to train interested employees if they had a lot of sales experience, or if they had been in radio and showed potential. “Otherwise, there are too many strikes against most people, and the (monetary) stakes are way too high” (2A202). This general manager went on to say that it was preferred that people had a successful sales background. "We'll train you if we have to, but we prefer not to" (2A187).
One general manager stepped far beyond the radio based academic discussion saying, “I don't care if a guy has been a garbage man, if he's a good one...if he thinks he can do this job, and we think he can do this job, he gets the job” (3A120). This manager alluded to the fact that it is more important to have a background of success, regardless of past experiences.

Peripheral Importance of College Training

While general managers were reluctant to mention “colleges and universities” during this discussion without the researcher raising the issue, a number of disciplines that colleges and universities teach were mentioned. One of those disciplines was business.

Sales people need to keep up on daily trades, look at station acquisitions, and understand branding. Business and current business understanding is important...you need to find out about clients. (5A110)

Another discipline included in the discussion was interpersonal communication. One general manager said, “The biggest thing I look for is for someone who is approachable and comfortable” (6A244). Another participant mentioned that the lack of interpersonal skills was why many people were not interested in sales. “Sales is difficult because not only do you have to make speeches and communicate, but you have to ask people for money” (2B48).

The same general manager who provided the garbage man metaphor added that writing ability, familiarity with computers, good interpersonal skills, ability to communicate orally and in writing, ability to think fast, and honesty and integrity were all important characteristics for sales associates (3A106).

There were only a few times when specific recommendations for sales training was presented by general managers during interviews. Only two
general manager willingly mentioned how college radio broadcast curricula could be designed to assist students interested in sales.

First, it should educate people as to why they should advertise...what's the benefit of advertising, what should occur, what makes up good advertising campaigns. Second, educate them on the benefits of radio. It's mobile...obtrusive, etc. (3A195)

The other general manager who talked about the idea of a college radio curricula designed to help students interested in radio sales mentioned teaching Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, but then quickly admitted that "every sales manager will break that (sales) process down in various ways" (4A198).

"Radio Stars": On-Air Talent, Programming, and Production

All six general managers tended to cluster on-air announcers with program directors and production departments. "Everyone wants to be a radio star" (1A275). This comment came from the small group general manager who had staff members with multiple roles. In this case, board-operators dealt directly with clients and helped put together what the clients wanted in their on-air program, infomercial, or regular commercial. This general manager wanted board-operators and programming staff to have the same characteristics as sales associates (a broad based knowledge combined with an idea of how to make a program work for a client).

For the other five general managers, the correlation between having a college degree and being a successful on-air radio personality or programmer was not apparent.

There are some people that are announcers that have college degrees...it's an accident...unless you happen to wake up one morning
and realize that you're the next Howard Stern, Rush Limbaugh, Rick Dees kind of guy...Yeah it can happen, but there is no correlation between successful announcing and having a college degree. (2A249)

The second general manager, who referred to some of the top syndicated radio announcers in the country, described how college may be a bad choice for those interested in being a successful on-air talent. "If you figure you're 21 or 22 coming out of college, you are several years behind your peers in terms of experience on the radio" (2A263).

Experience was also mentioned in a later interview. One group general manager pointed out that what you do from your first day in the business through your first three years is extremely vital to your success in the business (5A140).

It's like the golfer you watch on Sunday who hits great shots, but nobody sees the 3,000 practice shots from Monday through Wednesday. A lot of the book learning has a great deal to do with laying out the scheme, but you need to watch how all the good ones do it. You need to see how they approach things. From morning shows to creative people...you need to watch what's going on. (5A150)

This same general manager pointed out that everybody "wants to do the fun stuff" (5A160). Additionally, he brought up Howard Stern and Rush Limbaugh as the "Michael Jordans of the radio world." However, in this case, the general manager alluded to the fact that there are many successful people in secondary markets who learned by practicing, watching people, and paying attention to how others approach their job (5A169).

Another interviewee mentioned a personal lack of experience in programming, but added that program directors hire talent. The general manager in this situation does not evaluate talent, which is usually the case in Las Vegas. Instead, general managers evaluate station program directors
based on ratings they earn. Additionally, the general manager in this case said, “I’m only interested in...did (the program director) get me ratings or not, and did I spend $100,000 dollars for a (personality) when I know I can get one for $40,000?” (2B193).

Since program directors were the main concern for this group manager, exploration of his experience with successful program directors seems relevant. ...99 out of 100 (program directors) were your teenage radio disciples...they worked their way up, got an internship...both of mine (currently) are unique since they both have degrees. (2B235)...Almost always, PD’s were successful (announcers) just like successful sales managers were successful sales people. (2B255)

This general manager found it beneficial that both of his program directors had college degrees. For this group of stations, the general manager thought that college degrees helped the programmers handle the new broader responsibilities of being a program director. The example that followed involved one of the program directors who programmed two distinctly different radio stations for the group (hot adult contemporary and classic rock) (2B281). Referring back to the discussion of sales and sales management, the interviewee said, “I look at that degree, but at the sales manager and program director level, I’m looking for people with deep experience in decent markets” (2B295).

The final general manager interviewed indicated some specific characteristics for program directors, including: being in tune with the product, understanding listeners, being able to change any mistakes, and interacting and living with the radio station (6A175). Another general manager pointed out that both program directors and on-air talent need to be reliable and dependable to ensure that all air-shifts are covered (3A190).
Additionally, the third general manager indicated that a background in computer broadcasting programs is now essential since most radio stations are no longer tape and reel driven (3A180).

Essentially, the first five general managers did not lead the discussion into college curriculum involving programming or production, and referred to college as an unnecessary outlet for people interested in moving up from production assistant/on-air announcer to program director. On the other hand, the final general manager interviewed discussed his broadcast school experience, and asserted that those types of trade schools should be called “announcing schools”.

Most people there just want to be DJ’s. I’m not really sure...maybe college (4 year colleges) courses in broadcasting might be more focused than broadcasting school classes. Any school that teaches about radio should deal with the different things besides announcing...like marketing, advertising, promotions, and sales so that students can be well rounded, not just disk jockeys. (6A278)

“Unsung Heroes”: Support Staff

Discussion regarding support staff melded into a cluster that included commercial schedulers (traffic), business managers, and business office staff members. Engineering was generally assumed to be a separate entity that was part of the station, but not an area requiring stringent management supervision by general managers.

The highest specific academic degree recommended was an associates degree in accounting for students interested in becoming a business manager. Specifically, one general manager thought that in order to be a business
manager, you should get an associates degree in accounting and intern somewhere to learn a tracking system (2A291). A tracking system helps guarantee that clients are billed for each commercial the station plays for them. In this situation, the business office puts the commercial traffic department together with the accounting department. The business manager was responsible for those areas.

Other general managers did not discuss the status of their business managers, but repeatedly referred to traffic as an area for those uninterested in the communicative aspects of sales and on-air performance. This excludes the first interviewee who did not have an extensive commercial tracking system. The prime example was one general manager who said, "Traffic is for someone who doesn't necessarily like a lot of interpersonal interaction....in other words, just let me do business" (3A230).

While this description of traffic managers and commercial traffic personnel emerged, it was evident that this type of job was seen as mentally challenging. Traffic is the most difficult job at the radio station. The people that schedule commercials must mentally organize, work the spots in, work with sales. They are the hero at the radio station. (6A368)

Computer knowledge and endurance were two other characteristics mentioned during the interview process. "In traffic you definitely have to have computer skills...someone who is willing to stay in a room for several hours...organizational skills" (4A188). "You have to know what goes where" (3A245).

Continuing the discussion of radio's "unsung heroes", three general managers made specific reference to their front desk receptionists. "The receptionist job is probably the most important job in the building" (4A193). One general manager boasted about having the highest paid receptionist in the
market, but quickly added that the reception for the group had been with the company for several years, was very comfortable, and did a fantastic job. In terms of scheduling interviews for this study, all six groups had efficient receptionists who assisted with scheduling times to meet with general managers.

Radio sales, on-air jobs and programming concerns, specifics on college training, and the importance of the support staff were specific areas discussed during the interviews. Two specific domains, college degrees/experiential learning and technology and interpersonal skill development, emerged as well, and are worthy of documentation.

"Classes" Versus "Trenches"

The general consensus regarding college and university curriculum and its connection to radio broadcasting jobs emerged during the first interview with a general manager who thought education and class learning was important, but not as important as “certain traits” like drive and hard work (1A330). In this case, the interviewee quickly turned the discussion toward the internship experience saying that, "Class learning is important, but there is nothing like the hands-on in the trenches experience that an internship can give to people interested in any area of radio" (1A344).

The small group general manager commented that people don’t necessarily have to have a “big booming voice” if they’re interested in production or on-air, but need to learn how to use the voice they have. “Classes on voicing production and using your voice to make your on-air presentation sound the best would be good” (1A360). This general manager added that, “As far as technical classes in production and the basics, what button does what, understanding transmitter readings, how to take transmitter reading, that’s fine...complemented by the hands on internship experience” (1A374).
Learning by utilizing a college radio station was something that this same general manager thought was a positive learning experience for interested radio broadcasters. "You make mistakes, you have dead-air when you don't want it, but that is part of the whole learning process" (1A381).

In terms of mobility after graduation, this same interviewee suggested that colleges provide a college radio experience where students who eventually want to get into administration can get that experience, "...you really need to provide an atmosphere where someone can get that experience...dealing with legal issues...dealing with budgeting...promotional planning" (1A455).

Expanding on actual college radio curricula, the first general manager thought that from a programming perspective "colleges are probably preparing students for (some) radio jobs," but for other areas (sales, marketing, etc.) "not enough is done that specifically targets broadcasting and radio" (1A494). This general manager was indirectly recommending sales and marketing courses that target the radio broadcasting industry.

For sales, this general manager was interested in classes that could help potential associates learn how to "read people."

Maybe they could take psychology...learn how to read people...again some of this comes from the individual...an intuitive nature...people who can kind of read people...getting into someone's head and understanding others...that's all part of selling....you have to find out what that person wants, and convince them that you can give it to them....that's what it's all about. (1A404)

Additionally, sales and marketing classes involving role playing situations was something that the first general manager interviewed saw as beneficial. This general manager thought that it would be educational if there were classes that included roll playing sales situations just like stations do "...having one
person pose as a potential client and the sales person tries to make the sale...use customer relations...administration” (1A396).

Business law was an area that the first general manager thought should be a basic class colleges should teach students interested in radio (1A415). Soon after making this recommendation, the general manager mentioned that she thought most broadcast schools taught these types of courses (1A420).

The first interviewee summarized a variety of thoughts at the end of this portion of the discussion. As was the case with all six interviewees, this general manager mentioned the grand scheme of administration and its connection to running a group of radio stations. In this case, the general manager brought up college curricula saying “...colleges should provide a college radio experience where students who eventually want to get into administration can get that experience...an atmosphere where someone can get that experience...dealing with legal issues...dealing with budgeting and promotional planning” (1A460).

The second interviewer made this area of discussion a short lived one. You’re barking up the wrong business tree if you want to talk about academic credentials. There are a few people out there, just because it’s their own quirk, who won’t hire people without a degree. (2A225)

In this case, the general manager asserted that there is no correlation between success in radio broadcasting and having a college degree. "If you did the research, you would find that there is virtually no correlation between success up to a certain level and having a college degree...I do, a lot of people do...I know a lot of successful people that don’t....I’m not positive that Mel Karmazin (Infinity Broadcasting, President/CEO) has his degree” (2A229).

Despite describing the questionable value of the college degree in all areas of radio broadcasting, this general manager later went on to discuss the
importance of ratings. "We make our living based on ratings...the chips we have been dealt. It would be nice if they taught you about ratings in college...reading and understanding them" (2A372).

While the only specific mention of "teaching" regarded ratings, this general manager went on to describe the degree earned by a close relative who majored in mass communications at a regional university.

I got a real up-close dirty look at what goes on inside their mass communication program...the most up-to-date text she brought home was twenty years out-of-date. What I was experiencing in the real world was not even close to what she was studying. (2A379)

Further into the interview, the second general manager interviewed admitted that he felt that there are a few careers that colleges are "a trade school for...but I don't think it's appropriate for colleges to serve as a trade school for the radio industry" (2A429). The only two careers in radio specifically mentioned by this general manager that included college training were engineers and accountants. In this case, the general manager thought that basically the only thing students would "really have to know" would be "accounting 101 or maybe 102...which is a little managerial accounting...but frankly, not much of that either" (2A450).

Toward the end of this portion of the discussion, this interviewee returned to specific marketing elements as he mentioned that "what they teach you about management...about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs...the terminology and the jargon...Psyche 101...that's fine, but you need to understand it in the real world...radio doesn't hire that many rookies, especially in the programming area" (2A456).

Concerning the sales area of radio, this general manager said, "We'll hire anyone in sales if they look really promising...but really promising means that
you’ve demonstrated some success in something else, if not radio” (2A269). In terms of the “ideal sales” person, “We like to see some level of sales at some level for a year or two, if not in radio...I prefer to steal other radio sales people that are very successful” (2A473).

This interviewee encapsulated his thoughts regarding the communication degree midway through the interview saying, "I don’t think there’s any harm in getting a communications degree or any other degree if you want to be a radio executive, but outside of your sophomore year, there isn’t going to be of much practical use" (2A439).

Generally speaking, the next general manager characterized college as a “head start” for radio, but described that probably around half of the successful radio personnel he knew did not have a college degree. In this case the general manager felt that students should learn how radio stations are structured, what the various jobs and job descriptions within a radio station are, and individualized training programs for the different jobs within the station (3A310).

This third general manager interviewed also described a program similar to an internship where students don’t just “get coffee”, but get “on-hand skills”. “It would be great if the college could do some placement...where management signs off to expose the student to each part of the curriculum...event set-up, production, how to cut a spot, public information and public relations aspects...so that they can get an actual experience rather than get a lot of theoretical stuff” (3A318).

During this interview, the general manager suggested that the ports of entry work in two ways. One way was to work from the bottom up. His example was a University of Nevada, Las Vegas student who worked his way up as a promotions assistant, to promotions director, to a successful sales executive still with the company. In this situation, the skills that helped him succeed, according
to the general manager, were hard work, people skills, and the ability to work his way up (3A380). On the other hand, this general manager pointed to something that the previous interviewee described regarding hiring successful people from outside the industry. For this general manager, a recent hire who had successful sales experience at AT&T was much more valuable than an anxious school of communication graduate. "Sometimes you just can't get in" (3A408).

Earlier, this general manager commented that, "College degrees are always helpful...(but) if I'm typical, which I'd like to think I'm not, I'll take the guy with the better credentials" (3A129).

When the subject of "the ideal type of college radio curricula" came during the fourth interview, the general manager pointed out that most of his staff has a college degree. "Most everybody...a couple of the announcers have degrees...a lot of the education for on-air guys comes from broadcasting schools" (4A220). In this case, the general manager thought that colleges should go over the mechanics for on-air staff. "From there, it's all the typical stuff... grammar, current events, history."

This general manager thought that a degree focused on programming was less important than one concentrated in sales and marketing. Still, the interviewee thought a degree on the programming side shows commitment. "Quite a few GM's are coming out of programming...a college education is always important" (4A230). "(When you get to the general manager position), that's where their college education kicks in" (4A255).

Specific course work for radio positions was again discussed with the fourth general manager interviewed. Any college experience was essential for those involved in talk radio according this interviewee (4A250). For the general manager position, "One of the classes that helped were business law classes...helps with legalities" (4A265).
In terms of specific things colleges can do, this general manager suggested that guest speakers and industry leaders become more of a figure in the college setting. “Guest speakers from the industry are important...they can help students understand things like buying and selling of radio stations...trade information.” This general manager also thought journalism is important because of the amount of writing that goes on around the radio station. Another specific area of study was finance for those interested in going into sales.

As far as the college radio station, “I would have general managers of radio properties manage that property at different times...more structure from the industry side.” This interviewee offered more comments on the status of the college radio experience, “Those students are more off base sometimes...sometimes when kids go through the university radio stations, they come out with a lot of bad habits...they come out thinking they know what the radio industry is like, and they don’t” (4A375). The suggestion that followed was structuring the college radio station in a “commercial style” presentation while maintaining non-commercial status so that, “...when they walk out into these buildings...this isn’t their first experience...this is a different world” (4A377).

Specifically referring to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, this general manager commented that the university radio station was preparing students for the non-profit or public radio world. “You could take folks from the university station and send them over to KNPR (Las Vegas non-commercial/public radio station) and they’d probably understand the same language” (4A384).

Overall, the fourth interviewee thought that there was “a lot of people getting educated in the college system today,” but part of the “problem” was that people from other disciplines are not getting involved with radio. “I think part of
the problem would fall in the fact that the only people that get interested in our industry are those that earmark communications as their goal” (4A306).

The fifth general manager interviewed believed that university systems, like the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, had all the necessary equipment to learn how to “do radio”. This manager then related the college experience to entry level jobs and internships on the programming side of the business.

“(Students should) take professors teaching and take the time to access those studios (that are usually available when you have a part-time radio job or internship) as much as you can...use those production studios when you’re not on-the-air.” For those interested in aspects of radio other than programming, “…listen to the general manager or the sales manager...pick up bits and pieces” (5A185).

Additionally, the fifth general manager interviewed made it clear that students should understand that this is a serious business with “budgets on the line” and “shareholders interests” at stake. The key point that this fifth interviewee thought would help students adapt to such an environment was to “…just be in the environment, paying attention, and learn through osmosis. You learn so much about the day to day dealings over a two or three year period...you can develop” (5A195).

Overall, the fifth general manager interviewed thought that the most important experience during college was supplementing college courses with internships, and more importantly, “…doing something with those opportunities” (5A226). Supplemental internships and coursework were also eluded to by the third general manager interviewed. He mentioned that, “The trick with radio is the port of entry. There aren’t that many opportunities to get a good radio job” (3A355).
One final interview element involved the second general manager, the most outspoken of the six, who brought up the connection between a college degree and prosperity in life.

If you aspire to get into radio, for some twisted reason, and it's fair to say that most college graduates are reasonably ambitious and aspire to an upper-middle class or eventual upper-class situation economically...your best odds are to go into sales, move up to sales manager in your late twenties, get mentored by the right GM, and eventually get to be a station manager or GM by your mid to late 30's...early 40's. (2A268)

This general manager described that there was "only one route" for college graduates to go, the sales route. This general manager did not see a college degree as an essential commodity for students interested in programming (2A288).

Technology and Interpersonal Skills

Four of the six general managers referred to "computer skills" as something that students should learn. "The Internet is going to be a big part of radio's future" (1A477). This general manager felt that the Internet and radio will (continue to) merge in the 21st century. "I think that radio and the Internet will end up working together...and they are" (1A486).

A follow-up to this emerged during the third interview. "Students need to stay fresh and understand the technology...and most of your good instructors do keep up with new technology" (3A333). Additionally, this interviewee thought that students should never underestimate interpersonal skills if they already have the technological knowledge, "...it's a people business...a guy can come in and be Joe computer whiz, but not be able to relate to people...he's not going to make it in this business" (3A345). This general manager thought that most of
the "students" in the Las Vegas community had those people skills, and were "well rounded", with "a good sense of what goes on...usually a good skills set" (3A353). The third interviewee was straightforward in saying, "You don't work in this building if your parents didn't raise you right" (2B210).

Summary of Results

The six Las Vegas radio general managers interviewed represented 19 stations, 17 Arbitron rated stations, and 2 non-Arbitron rated stations. The companies these general managers were associated with conduct business with thousands of other radio stations in different markets across the country. These stations will continue to look for and develop sales associates, programming talent and support staff.

First, general managers were most concerned about the make-up of their sales staff. General managers highlighted that broad based knowledge that included knowing the programming side of radio and the sales/marketing side were equally important. "Creativity plus drive" (6A229) also characterized another domain that general managers thought made sales executives successful.

Selling an intangible product and "getting the business" was another dimension of the successful sales associate described by Las Vegas general managers. In order for sales associates to use that knowledge, general managers thought sales associates should be able to "take on challenges" (4A150), maintain a high level of empathy (2B111), use self motivation, creativity, and maintain financial goals (4A148). Additionally, computer, interpersonal, and oral and written communication skills were discussed despite the fact that only two general managers specifically mentioned how college broadcast curricula could influence the lives of potential sales associates. Two
other general managers emphasized learning how to develop advertising campaigns and learning more about the power of radio as a successful intrusive medium (3A195). Still, general managers pointed out that a college degree could help students interested in eventually becoming general managers.

Secondly, after general managers described the significance of sales, they characterized successful “radio stars”, including on-air talent, program directors, and commercial production personnel. The relationship between having a college degree and being successful in any programming role was not important. In fact, one general manager thought that students going to college would potentially be behind in the radio job market (2A263). Others alluded to college students getting any position at a radio station, paying close attention to the working environment while watching successful people, and working up to a successful level. Some characteristics of successful programming staff included versatility (2B281), understanding listeners, living with the radio station (6A175), and having a background in computer broadcasting programs (3A180).

The final general manager, the only general manager who took broadcasting classes of any sort, thought that a four-year college experience that taught marketing, promotions, and sales, along with regular production and control board operation techniques, was ideal for the well rounded individual interested in programming (6A278).

The highest degree recommended for support staff by a general manager was an associates degree in accounting for business managers (2A291). Otherwise, support staff, which included receptionists and commercial traffic schedulers, was described as a difficult position and one for those not interested in selling or programming. Knowledge, endurance, and organizational skills were essential for successful support staff members according to general managers.
Looking at the importance of college for members of the radio broadcasting industry, the consensus was that class learning was important, but not as important as having experience. One general manager eluded to the fact that students coming out of college are usually 21 or 22, and may be behind their peers in the industry who started when they were 17 or 18 (2A263).

While general managers thought that colleges were doing a “decent” job of training students, they generally felt that areas of radio like promotional planning, sales, marketing, budgeting, and legal requirements were lacking in four-year college communication curricula.

Recommendations for college radio curricula included involving guest speakers and industry leaders in college programs, and changing the way college radio stations operate. One general manager suggested having local general managers take turns managing local college radio properties. Another suggestion was to run the non-commercial college station like a commercial station so that students “understand the same language” (4A384).

Technology and interpersonal skills were the final variables general managers associated with success. General managers wanted students who understand technology, computers, and the future of radio. Additionally, “people skills” were a necessary asset for potential employees.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In chapter one, Watson (1993), a telecommunications professor at Eastern Michigan University, noted that the study of radio and radio's influence on society was important. Watson felt that radio broadcasting was treated as the basic unit that preceded television courses. One general manager supported this view by describing radio sales as “different from most sales jobs” because radio is an intangible product. Many would say television is more tangible because of the pictures.

Five out of six general managers said there was no correlation between having a college degree and being a successful radio personality or programmer. Although this does not pertain to on-air performance or radio marketing, it does not support Watson's claim that radio needs additional treatment in communication programs.

In chapter two, Blanchard (1988) discussed the lack of appreciation toward university and college journalism/mass communication programs by media professionals. The current study revealed that general managers portrayed a sense of respect for college and university communication programs, but did not necessarily see those programs as necessary.

Corrigan, another professor with several years of newspaper experience, explained that, "Academia is out of touch with the needs of the news industry" (Corrigan, 1993, p. 34). In relation to Corrigan's study, academia's connection
to radio was the central issue. Respondents chose to highlight personal skills as opposed to college training. This might be due to the fact that the six general managers interviewed had a general understanding of the interviewer's affiliation with the local university.

AEJMC concerns about broadcasting students writing skills may be warranted, but were not shared as a major concern by general managers. Personal characteristics and experience were the major concerns of general managers.

Internships, which the AEJMC thought were vital to successful employment, were said to be "important" to general managers. Specifically, internships were experiences that helped students "get their foot in the door".

A stronger link between universities and broadcasting companies was discussed by the AEJMC in 1989. While this may be needed in Las Vegas, it is evident through this study that this link is no less the responsibility of general managers and industry practitioners than of college and university professors. The blame does not rest solely on universities not allowing grant leaves to faculty to work in the broadcasting and cable industries. This was supported by one general manager who acknowledged that guest speakers were important and could add to students knowledge of radio as a trade.

An earlier study determined that the best type of academic experience in television broadcasting might be a capstone semester, which included a five-day-a-week television news laboratory with 12 hours of television news laboratory experience. In comparison to radio and this study, a five-day-a-week on-air/hands-on experience combined with 12 hours of radio broadcasting (news, traffic, sports, etc.) experience would certainly bode well for Las Vegas general managers based on their desire for hands-on experience.
Lind and Danowski (1999) described computer skills as an essential classroom entity that entry-level employees needed, associated with their survey of broadcasters and media educators. The Las Vegas radio general managers interviewed for this study did not stress the importance of computers during their interviews. The third general manager indicated that a "background" in computer broadcasting programs was favorable (3A180), but general understanding of the radio business was more important than the specific technical computer knowledge. Since radio station groups have different computer programs (the four largest station groups in Las Vegas have different computer networks), general managers were more concerned with employees lacking basic understanding of computers and analog equipment. This is obviously different for support staff, who usually need a solid understanding of programs like Windows or DOS.

Broadcasters pointed more to personal qualities, while educators commented more on employee communication skills in Lind and Danowski's study (1999). Las Vegas general managers melded personal qualities and communication skills during the interviews. Las Vegas general managers not only wanted employees who have the personality to be on-the-air, on the phone, or in the front office, they wanted, as the second general manager described, employees that parents "raise(d) right" (2B210). In other words, general managers wanted well rounded individuals in the workplace.

In chapter two, Shelton, Lane, and Waldhart (1999) pointed to experiential education and group work as dominate trends in communication education, along with computer technology. Experiential education was important to Las Vegas general managers interviewed. All six general managers thought the college radio station experience and internships were positive, but "commercial style" presentation experience was important to the fourth general
manager who asserted that commercial radio is much different from public radio and many commercial or non-commercial college stations. Some colleges require students to follow strict format guidelines, while others allow free form broadcasting with minimal guidelines. Promotions, public affairs, music, news, and general station operation make or break the college radio experience.

North Central College in Naperville, Illinois, for example, has won several College Marconi Awards and College Media Advisor Awards, along with starting the careers of many Chicagoland broadcasters because of WONC-FM, the college's non-commercial radio station. Not only does the college have undergraduate broadcasting classes, but students work fifteen-plus hours a week with promotions, news, sports, programming, or other departments at WONC-FM. The station is completely staffed by students and operates twenty-four hours a day.

Additionally, North Central College is avoiding the problem mentioned by the fourth general manager. This Las Vegas general manager felt that part of the “problem” with most college systems was that they only catered to students who earmarked communications as their goal. North Central College allows students in any department to be a part of the radio station.

The Las Vegas general managers interviewed wanted more practical communication courses, but at the same time, were interested in students who did not necessarily major in communication. General managers wanted radio broadcasting to be more closely examined in college broadcasting curricula, especially the study of the benefits of radio and the radio advertising experience. Students who minor in communication or double major in something along with communication might have an advantage over students who major solely in communication.
Students interested in announcing should think much more carefully about their future than students interested in other aspects of radio broadcasting. If a student does not supplement the college experience with an internship or part-time work in the local radio market, they risk “being several years behind” other young broadcasters (2A263). Obviously, since some level of voice talent and creativity are part of successful announcing careers, college students interested in a career in announcing should know what to expect. College media professors and advisors need to let students know what they are capable of doing and not doing.

The second general manager interviewed wanted “people with deep experience in decent markets” (2B295). Advancing in radio means that talent must work their way up in a larger market like Las Vegas (Arbitron rated market 40). Typically, the bigger the market, the better the exposure, and the more money broadcasters receive. Las Vegas is an ideal market in which to begin a career, starting with an internship or part-time position.

Interestingly, Las Vegas general manager perceptions of what is happening at the local university (University of Nevada, Las Vegas) differ from reality. While the University of Nevada, Las Vegas does not focus specifically on radio performance, areas like programming, marketing, and promotions are studied. Both parties clearly are not talking enough.

This study showed that radio general managers may prefer experience over a college degree for most jobs in Las Vegas radio. College students interested in programming should take advantage of any part-time opportunities or internships programs offered at local radio stations to keep pace in the job market with “teenage radio disciplines” (2B235). The academic experience combined with job experience could possibly demonstrate “hard work” and
"drive", two valuable elements general managers were looking for in all employees.

Sales was characterized as the most important department in Las Vegas radio by general managers interviewed. College students interested in becoming sales associates in Las Vegas radio should take courses in marketing, advertising, business law, psychology, and programming to gain a broad based education. Additionally, it is important for students to have a successful background in some form or another, whether it be selling clothes at a local fashion mall or representing a record label on campus. Recall the example given by the third general manager, "I don't care if a guy has been a garbage man, if he's a good one...if he thinks he can do this job, and we think he can do this job, he gets the job" (3A120).

It seems all radio jobs require at least a minimal amount of interpersonal skills. For anyone interested in radio, honing those interpersonal skills and breaking into the industry on the support staff side is a logical first step to being promoted in the Las Vegas radio industry. The fifth general manager said, "(Students should) take professors teaching and take the time to access those studios (that are usually available when you have a part-time radio job or internship) as much as you can...use those production studios when you're not on-the-air" (or doing another job). For those interested in aspects of radio other than programming, "...listen to the general manager or the sales manager...pick up bits and pieces" (5A185). Support staff members interested in developing skills should consider college classes, along with developing close relationships with mentors in the radio industry.

General managers interviewed for this study felt that college communication departments were doing an "adequate" job of preparing students for radio and asserted that college was usually unnecessary if employees had
the right experience. Unfortunately, general managers may not understand the overall goal of higher education, and their lack of understanding academia and the university structure may make them unqualified to evaluate radio broadcasting curricula.

While three general managers interviewed had four-year degrees, none of them majored in mass communication. The second general manager interviewed was married to a school of communication graduate who studied mass communication while they lived in a different market.

Still, colleges and universities interested in better teaching for students interested in radio broadcasting should still take note of some recommendations made by Las Vegas general managers interviewed in this study. Involving students in a "broad based curricula" is important, along with teaching promotional planning, sales, marketing, budgeting, and legal requirements. Students interested in programming should obviously take production classes where they can be trained to use their own voice to produce commercials.

Unfortunately, general managers do not realize that college communication departments do not always teach classes like marketing, which is usually part of the business college. Developing curricula that encompass each of those areas is difficult with current university structures. College students interested in studying radio broadcasting in a communication department should possibly be advised to take additional classes in areas like advertising, marketing, accounting, and business law.

Suggestions for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to gain perspectives from a variety of Las Vegas general managers to determine what they felt was part of a strong radio broadcasting curriculum. An important discovery was the minimal emphasis
general managers place on communication studies. Ironically, despite emphasizing experience over education and having little of their own experience in the university setting, all six general managers willingly gave suggestions on how to improve college radio curricula.

This study did indeed gain perspectives from general managers on college radio broadcasting curricula, but future research in this area might include showing general managers a specific college radio curriculum structure, and getting their suggestions. This would help erase shortcomings and ambiguity in terms of course names and descriptions.

Additional research might also track the progress of non-college graduates in radio versus college graduates to see what success level each group attains. College radio stations also need to be more closely examined to find out if they are preparing undergraduates interested in working full-time in radio after graduation.

It was unclear whether a radio broadcasting curricula separate from general mass communication and journalism was important. Future studies should not only explore the relationship of radio broadcasting with departments outside the communication discipline, as indicated earlier, but also within the communication discipline.
APPENDIX I

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW ELEMENTS TO INCORPORATE

Introduction

Tell me about yourself. Describe your background and history prior to joining your current station. (At some point in interview, assess...Are you a college graduate? If so, what was your major?)

Sales

Describe your sales staff. Are there specific traits that you look for when hiring sales staff? Are they mostly college graduates? Do you prefer that they have a college degree? Are there certain college classes that you look for? How can colleges and universities prepare students for radio sales?

Support Staff

Describe your support staff. Does college experience matter for this group?

Production

Describe your production staff. Are there specific traits that you look for when hiring production staff? Are they mostly college graduates? Do you prefer that they have a college degree? Are there certain college classes that you look for? How can colleges and universities prepare students interested in production? Is it important to master digital production skills in college?

Traffic

Describe the commercial handling staff. Are they mostly college graduates? Do you prefer that they have a college degree? Are there specific traits that you look for? Are there specific college classes that you look for?
Management

Describe the management. Are they mostly college graduates? What type of college programs best prepare students to move into management? Are there certain background traits that lead to management positions?

Performance/Creative Staff/On-Air Talent

Describe your creative staff. Are they mostly college graduates? Do you prefer that they have a college degree? Are there specific traits or college classes that you look for? Can you teach creativity?

General Questions and Follow-Up

In general, is the study of radio broadcasting as an individual medium important to your station(s)? Why or why not?

What do you think are characteristics of the ideal college radio broadcasting curriculum?

Do you think that an on-campus radio station is a helpful learning tool? Why or why not?

What does the ideal college radio station do (on and off the air)?

What types of internships and outside job programs do you think work best for college students?

Do you think that colleges and universities are adequately preparing students to work for companies like yours? Why or why not?
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