

Un examen historique du lien entre le marché du travail américain des télécommunications et l'enseignement dans l'Université

Lee B. BECKER, Tudor VLAD

James M.Cox Jr. Center for International Mass
Communication Training and Research, University of
Georgia, Etats-Unis de l'Amérique, lbbecker@uga.edu,
tvlad@arches.uga.edu

Résumé : Ce rapport analyse d'une part les tendances des expériences en journalisme et communication de masse des étudiants et diplômés qui ont choisi une spécialisation de télévision et, d'autre part, la manière dont les programmes offerts par les universités des Etats-Unis ont tenté de répondre aux défis auxquels ont été confrontés les médias traditionnels suite à la crise économique et au développement des nouvelles technologies. Ces dernières années, les diplômés des programmes américains de journalisme et communication de masse ont été confrontés à un marché du travail extrêmement problématique. L'analyse des données met en exergue trois modèles historiques importants pour les segments de télévision et télécommunications du marché du travail américain. En premier temps, l'industrie a connu une coopération étroite avec les universités qui constituent le pool pour la plupart des recrutements en position de débutant. En deuxième temps, le marché pour les diplômés issus de ces programmes est très faible. Enfin, les inscriptions à l'université n'ont pas été affectées par la faiblesse du marché du travail, même s'il y a des tendances qui affirment un certain déclin. Jusqu'à présent, les universités ont répondu à l'évolution et aux changements de l'industrie en ajoutant des cours

focalisés sur les compétences que le nouveau marché semble exiger, mais elles n'ont pas modifié leurs structures de base.

Mots-clés : marché du travail des média et télécommunications, enseignement, journalisme et communication de masse, Etats-Unis de l'Amérique

A Historical Examination of the U.S. Telecommunications Labor Market's Link to University Education

Abstract: This report examines the trends in the experiences of U.S. journalism and mass communication students and graduates who picked a broadcast specialization and how academic programs in the country have tried to respond to the challenges that have been brought to the traditional media by the economic crisis and by the new technologies. Graduates of U.S. journalism and mass communication programs have confronted a very tough job market in recent years. The data reviewed in this article show three historical patterns of importance for the broadcasting and telecommunications segments of the U.S. labor market. First, the industry has enjoyed a very close relationship with universities that provide the vast majority of its entry-level employees. Second, the market for the graduates being produced by those programs is very weak. Third, university enrollments have not been greatly affected by the weak labor market, though there are suggestions that enrollments may be about to decline. So far, the universities have responded to the industry changes by adding course offerings focusing on skills that the new market seems to require, but they have not altered their basic structures.

Keywords: Broadcasting media job market, journalism and mass communication education, U.S.A.

In the United States, getting a job in broadcast journalism, as well in print journalism, public relations, advertising and other communication occupations, comes almost always after completion of a university degree. The most common degree of students entering broadcast journalism in the U.S. is from a specialized university school in the field of study called journalism and mass communication.

The linkage between the demands of the television labor market and the supply of the educational institutions, however, is not a simple one. The job market for journalism and mass communication graduates in the United States has varied considerably across time, reflecting changes in the national economy. The number of students enrolled in journalism and mass communication programs have varied less.

For the last two decades, enrollments increased on a year-to-year basis despite fluctuations in the labor market until 2009, when they declined slightly (Becker, Vlad & Olin, 2009, Becker, Vlad & Desnoes, 2010).

The economic crisis in the U.S. and problems that media industries in the country have faced at the end of first decade of the new century have affected dramatically the job market for graduates of the nation's university-level journalism and mass communication education programs. The turmoil has not been limited to the entry-level segment of the job market. Television, radio and news magazines trimmed their staffs, often by eliminating positions at the top. About 6,000 full-time jobs also were cut in U.S. newspaper newsrooms in both 2008 and 2009 (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009, 2010).

University programs in journalism and mass communication play an important role in discussions about the communications occupations and their efforts at professionalization (Becker, Fruit & Caudill, 1987; Froehlich & Holtz-Bacha, 2003).

This report examines the trends in the experiences of U.S. journalism and mass communication students and graduates who picked a broadcast specialization and how academic programs in the country have tried to respond to the challenges that have been brought to the traditional media by the economic crisis and by the new technologies.

1. Methodology

The data come from three research projects of the Cox International Center: the Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Enrollments, the Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates, and the Survey of Editors and News Directors.

The methods used in the Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Enrollments have remained unchanged since 1988. All degree-granting senior colleges and universities with courses organized under the labels of journalism and mass communication listed in two directories are included. These are the Journalism and Mass Communication Directory, published annually by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, and *The Journalist's Road to Success: A Career Guide*, formerly published and printed by the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund, Inc., and now known as the Dow Jones News Fund.

A combination of these two directories produced 484 listings in 2009, the most recent year for which data are available. A questionnaire was mailed to the

administrator of each of these programs. Three other mailings were sent to the nonrespondents. As this project is a census, all the administrators of the programs who had not responded were contacted by telephone and asked to answer as many of the questions over the telephone as possible. The questionnaire asked the administrators to provide information on enrollments, of degrees granted, tuition and fees, skills taught in the curricula, faculty size, faculty characteristics, and faculty hiring.

The *Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates* monitors the employment rates and salaries of graduates of journalism and mass communication programs in the United States in the year after graduation. In addition, the survey tracks the curricular activities of those graduates while in college, examines their job-seeking strategies, and provides measures of the professional attitudes and behaviors of the graduates upon completion of their college studies.

Each year a sample of schools is drawn from those listed in the AEJMC *Directory* or in *The Journalist's Road to Success: A Career Guide*, participate in this survey. Selection of schools for the sample is probabilistic, so that those chosen represent the population of schools in the two directories. In 2009, 84 schools were drawn from the 483 unique entries of four-year programs in the U.S. (including Puerto Rico) in the two directories. Data from the 2009 graduates are the most recent available at this time.

Administrators at the selected schools for the graduate survey are asked to provide the names and addresses of their spring bachelor's and master's degree recipients. A questionnaire is then mailed to all spring graduates receiving either a bachelor's or a master's degree from the selected programs. The same questionnaire is mailed again twice to the nonrespondents. The graduates can also complete the instrument online, using a unique password for access to the web survey.

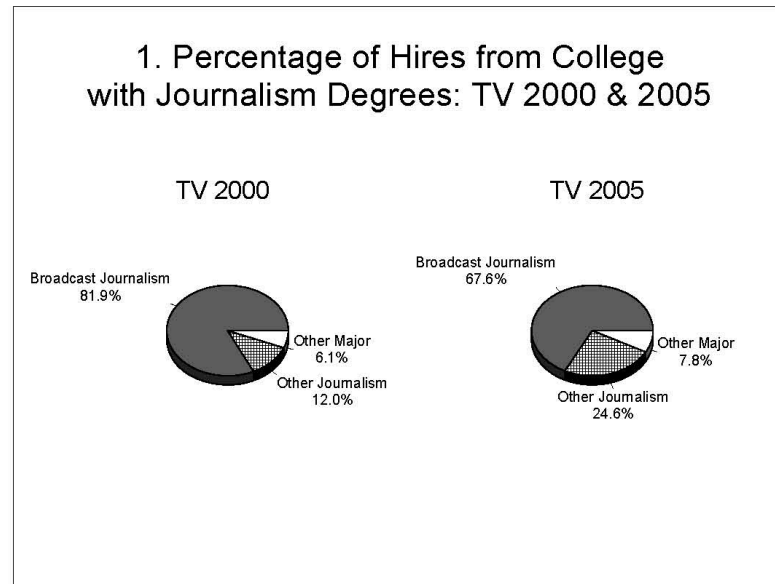
The *Survey of Editors and News Directors* (Becker, Vlad, Pelton & Papper, 2006) is conducted every five years. The most recent report contains data from 2005 from a RTNDA Ball State University survey and from the Daily Newspaper Hiring Survey conducted by the Cox International Center. The RTNDA Ball State University survey was conducted by mail and fax in the fourth quarter of 2005 among all 1,617 operating, non-satellite television stations and 9,013 U.S. radio stations. The 2005 *Daily Newspaper Hiring Survey* was conducted from February through July of 2006 with editors of all 1,550 daily newspapers listed in the *Editor & Publisher International Year Book* for 2005.

2. Findings

In 2009, 17.9 percent of the graduates of journalism and mass communication programs had broadcasting/telecommunications as their specialty, compared to 19.0 percent in public relations, 13.3 percent in news-editorial and 12.3 percent in advertising. About 14 percent of the graduates said they had an opportunity to work on campus on television related activities. Since 2000, the grades of the Bachelor's degree recipients with a broadcasting specialization have constantly been slightly lower than those with a print journalism focus.

One quarter of the 2009 journalism and mass communication graduates said they sought a job in a television station, four percent higher than a year before. Minority Bachelor's degree recipients were more likely to look for jobs in television (29.4 percent) than their no-minority colleagues (21.1 percent), while more male (27.8 percent) than female (20.7 percent) graduates sought for a job in television.

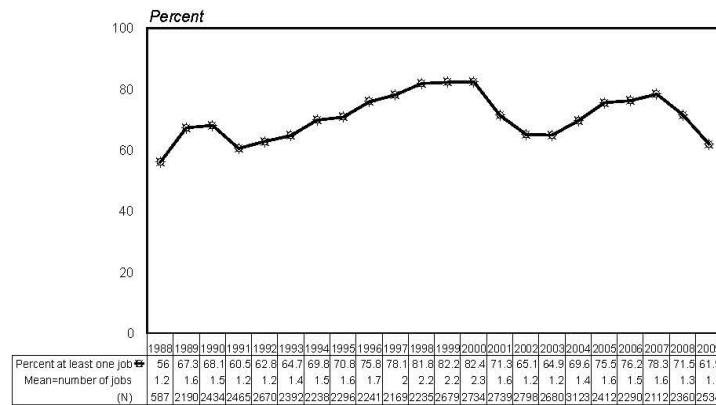
Historically, at the entry level, a vast majority of those who got a job in a TV station or in a daily newspaper came from a journalism school. By the 2005 estimate, 922 percent of those entering television stations in the United States came from a university journalism and mass communication program. That figure has not varied in any significant way since 1990. For daily newspaper newsrooms, the figure was 85%. Of those hired with a journalism degree in 2000 and 2005, a vast majority had a broadcast specialization (Chart 1).



The 2009 graduates of the U.S. journalism and mass communication programs, however, confronted a job market unlike any that graduates have encountered in the nearly 25 years for which comparable data are available (Becker, Vlad, Desnoes & Olin, 2010). All the media market indicators in 2009 and early 2010 showed declines from a year earlier, which already had produced record low levels of employment. One of those indicators, for job offers on graduation, is shown in Chart 2.

2. Job offers to Bachelor's degree recipients

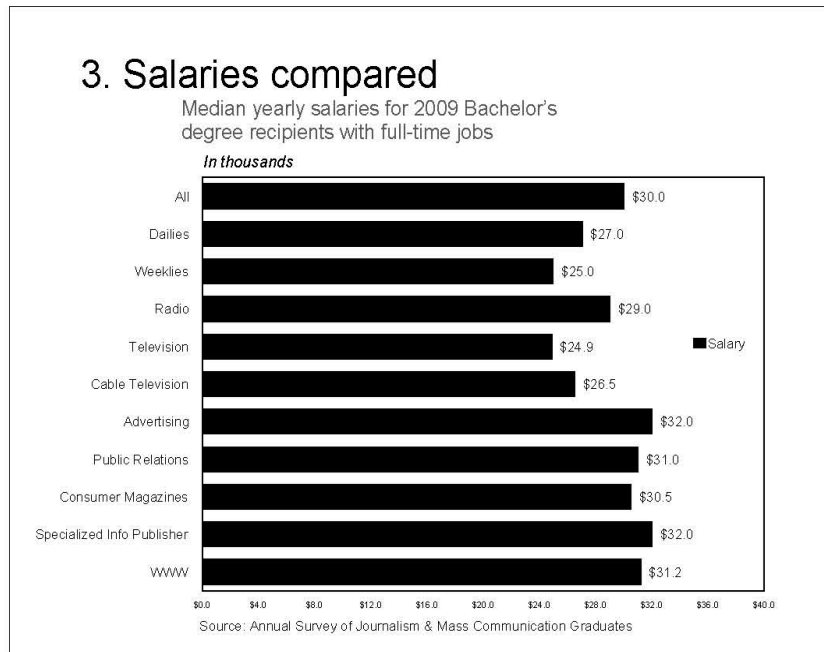
Job offers to Bachelor's degree recipients:
percent with at least one job offer



Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates

Only five percent of the Bachelor's degree recipients found jobs in television six to eight months after graduation, while less than one percent were hired in radio or cable. A quarter of the students with a broadcasting major found jobs in their own specialty, while 19.7 percent were unemployed and 26.2 percent got a job outside the field of communication. Of those who found a job in telecommunication, half were full-time employees.

There were no increases in the salaries of journalism and mass communication graduates for the fourth consecutive year, meaning that graduates actually were receiving less money because of the effects of inflation. The salaries of those graduates who found jobs in television followed the same pattern. Their median annual salary of \$24,900 has slightly increased from \$24,000 a year earlier, but still was the lowest salary of journalism and mass communication Bachelor's degree recipients (Chart 3).



The percentage of all graduates who said that they selected their jobs because of availability and not because it was what they wanted to do grew from 23.1 in 2007 to 43.9 in two years later. Four in 10 of the Bachelor's degree recipients said there were specific skills that they did not acquire while being in school that would have helped them in the job market. Most of those skills were in the areas of graphics and design, digital media, and economics. Seven in 10 of the graduates said that they watched TV news the day before they filled the questionnaire, down from 82.7 percent in 1994.

Undergraduate enrollments in journalism and mass communication programs in the United States have generally increased since 1993, while master's level enrollments declined from 1995 until 2001. The end of the 1990s was a period of strong economic growth and high employment, making it attractive to stay in the labor market rather than return to the university for study. When the economy weakened after 2000, master's level enrollment began its growth again.

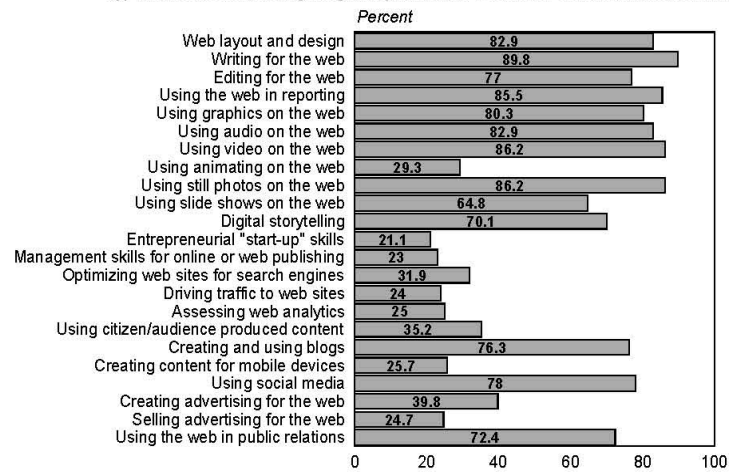
As was true a year earlier, there is little evidence that undergraduate student interests within the field of journalism and mass communication shifted markedly from the autumn of 2008 to the autumn of 2009. The percentage of students enrolled in print journalism, broadcast journalism, or some type of journalism that does not

differentiate between print and broadcast did drop from 29.3 percent to 28.3 percent, and the percentage of students with this interest is down 3.6 percent from 2007. But 2007 was a high point in interest in some form of journalism in the last decade, and the 28.3 percent of the enrolled undergraduates interested in journalism in 2009 was higher than the 27.4 percent for 2006. At the same time, the percentage of students interested in print journalism in 2009 (6.0 percent) was the lowest figure recorded back through 1989. The 14.5 percent of the students interested in journalism that is not differentiated between print and broadcast was the largest recorded except in 2007, when it was 15.2 percent. The percentage of students in telecommunications and media production was 8.7 in 2009, compared with 7.4 percent a year earlier. The percentage of students in public relations was 14.4 in 2009, compared with 14.7 percent in 2008. The percentage of students in advertising in 2009 was 7.5, compared with 9.1 percent in 2008. All of the other majors enroll relatively small numbers of students, and 9.6 percent of the students were classified as undecided.

Many journalism and mass communication programs in the United States have made efforts to adapt their curricula to reflect progress in the technologies and to get students prepared for new communication jobs. In 2010, the administrators of all those programs were given a list of 23 skills and asked to indicate if those skills were being taught in the unit's curriculum. Chart 4 shows those 23 items in the order they were presented to the administrators and shows that many Web skills are now taught as part of most journalism and mass communication programs. Most prominent is writing for the Web, which is taught at nine of 10 programs, followed by the teaching of how to use photos on the Web and using the Web in reporting. Only one in five of the programs is teaching the students entrepreneurial "start-up" skills, and only one in four is teaching students how to drive traffic to Web sites or how to assess Web analytics. Only one in four is teaching how to create content for mobile devices.

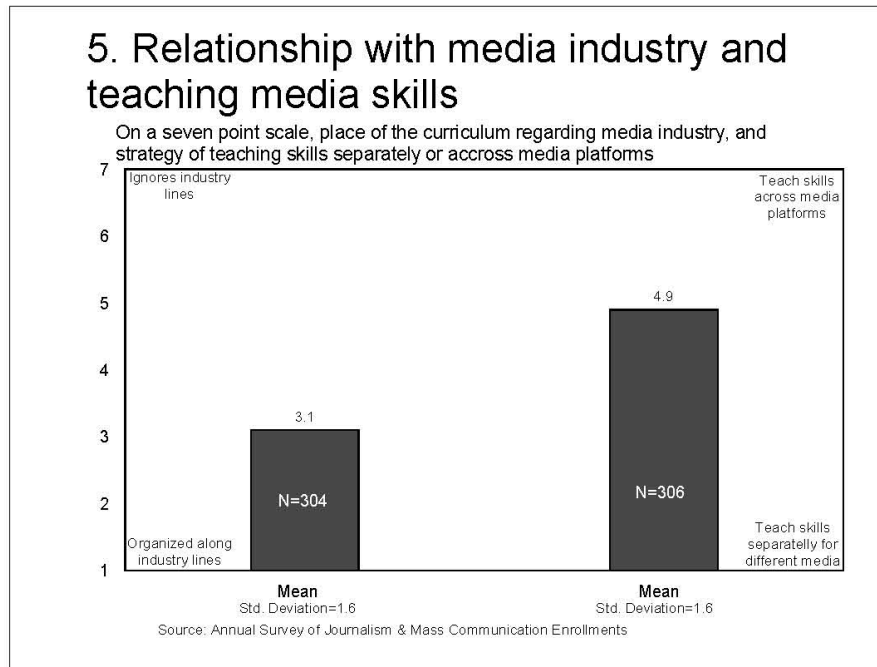
4. Skills taught in curricula

Types of skills now being taught in journalism and mass communication curricula



Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Enrollments

Two additional questions asked administrators where they would place their programs. The first question asked the administrators if the program was organized along industry lines or ignored industry lines. A score of 1 indicated that the program was organized along industry lines, and a score of 7 indicated it ignored those lines. The mean score for all programs was 3.1, meaning the programs overall continue to reflect the old industrial bases of journalism and mass communication. The second question asked the administrators to place their program on a continuum from teaching skills separately for different media and teaching skills across media platforms. The mean score for this distribution is 4.9, meaning the average program falls closer to teaching skills across media platforms (Chart 5).



3. Concluding Comments

It seems certain that, in historical terms, the first decade of this century will be viewed as one of major change in all of the communication industries in the U.S. and throughout much of the world. These changes, brought about by the new delivery options offered by the Internet and the inefficiencies and limitations of almost all other delivery mechanisms by comparison, have been most pronounced for the print media, with their more obviously antiquated technologies and delivery system. The changes have been great for what was once called the broadcast industries as well, forcing the stations to rethink their products and their relationships with their audiences.

These changes in the communication industries have had tremendous impact on the labor market for the various communication occupations and even on the definitions of those occupations (Becker & Vlad, 2011). And they have challenged the educational institutions that are linked to those occupations. In the U.S., where universities historically have offered programs designed to serve specific niche's of the labor market, the response to the challenge has only just begun.

The data reviewed in this article show three historical patterns of importance for the broadcasting and telecommunications segments of the U.S. labor market. First, the industry has enjoyed a very close relationship with universities that provide the vast majority of its entry-level employees. Second, the market for the graduates being produced by those programs is very weak, with graduates having difficulty finding work and getting low wages when they do find jobs. Finally, so far, university enrollments have not been greatly affected by the weak labor market, though there are suggestions that enrollments may be about to decline. So far, the universities have responded to the industry changes largely in rather simple ways. They have added course offerings focusing on skills that the new market seems to require, but they have not altered their basic structures.

What happens next will be fascinating for historians who focus on the communication industries and the telecommunications industry in particular, and for those who focus more generally on the relationship between labor markets and educational and training institutions. For those at the center of the change, however, some other descriptor than “fascinating” may come to mind.

References

- Becker, L.B., & Vlad, T. (2011). Where professionalism begins, in W. Lowrey and P. Gade (Eds.) *Changing the News: The Forces facing Journalism in Uncertain Times*, New York: Routledge in press, 249-269.
- Becker, L.B., Vlad, T., & Olin, D. (2009). 2008 Enrollment report: Slow rate of growth may signal weakening of demand. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 64 (3), 232-257.
- Becker, L. B., Vlad, T., Pelton, R., & Papper, R. A. (2006, August). *2005 Survey of editors and news directors*. Paper presented at the conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in San Antonio, TX. Retrieved August 16, 2009, from http://www.grady.uga.edu/annualsurveys/Editors_News_Directors_Survey/Editors_News_Dir_2005.php
- Becker, L. B., Vlad, T., Olin, D., Hanisak, S., & Wilcox, D. (2009). *2008 Annual survey of journalism & mass communication graduates*. Retrieved July 12, 2009, from http://www.grady.uga.edu/annualsurveys/Graduate_Survey/Graduate_2008/Grad2008_Fullcolor.pdf
- Becker, L.B., Vlad, T., Desnoes, P., & Olin, D. (2010). *2009 Annual survey of journalism & mass communication graduates*. Retrieved March 12, 2011 from http://www.grady.uga.edu/annualsurveys/Graduate_Survey/Graduate_2009/Grad2009MergedB&W%20rev%204%206%2011.pdf

- Becker, L.B., Fruit, J., & Caudill, S. (1987). *The training and hiring of journalists*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Pub. Comp.
- Froehlich, R., & Holtz-Bacha, C. (Eds.) (2003). *Journalism education in Europe*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Project for Excellence in Journalism (2009, 2010). *State of the news media*. Retrieved on March, 12, 2011 from: <http://stateofthemedias.org/2010/>