Thursday, November 1, 2007:

Leaving Elon at around 4:30 p.m., we were all anxious to reach Atlanta. Although the six-hour drive primarily consisted of resting and socializing, we used this time to learn about the media outlets we would be visiting over the next two days. Prior to leaving, we were each assigned to research a media outlet to create a two-page fact sheet consisting of important organizational information as well as questions that would help guide a discussion while visiting each location. The folders of each outlet circulated throughout the bus, offering insight into each organization and preparing us for our visits.

Six hours seemed to pass so slowly. My excitement continued to increase as we neared Atlanta, and when we finally arrived, I couldn’t wait to wake up the next morning and start experiencing the profession I had decided to pursue. I would also like to note that the hotel we stayed in was truly magnificent. Honoring the city spirit of Atlanta, our hotel had 47 stories, and an open center made the view from the top awe-inspiring. I have included a couple pictures to better illustrate the magnitude of the hotel.

Surrounded by friends, in a wonderful hotel, situated in a beautiful city, I had to literally force myself to go to sleep that night because my enthusiasm made sleeping impossible. I couldn’t wait to wake the next morning and begin my journey.

Friday, November 2, 2007:

You would think waking up at 6:30 a.m. would be a daunting task, yet it seemed surprisingly easy to wake up with the mindset I had. I was wide-eyed and genuinely enthused to start my day. CNN, the Weather Channel, WSB-TV, and dinner with Elon Alums were all part of the day’s plan. Each stop provided a tour of the facility and a chance to learn about entering the field in coming years.
I was particularly excited to visit CNN since it has been my dream to work as a reporter for CNN ever since I decided to major in communications. The trip certainly lived up to my high expectations. Led by Lisa Guthrie, we not only heard about the current and future reporting strategies of CNN, but also had the chance to visit the news and control rooms and observe a live broadcast inside the CNN news room. Guthrie explained that CNN uses the ticker to drive viewers to their website, thus converging its media coverage. Additionally, CNN is attempting to tap into the younger viewer demographic to broaden its audience. After discussing CNN’s efforts, we toured the newsroom and observed how the control room operates. The newsroom was truly inspirational. I was like a kid in a candy store. The room was surreal. Many reporters were diligently researching stories and I felt right at home.

In the newsroom, we had the opportunity to see the anchors go live for the 9 a.m. broadcast. Just seeing the anchors go live reassured me that one day I too could be sitting at the desk and relaying the important stories to the public. After an amazing visit to the newsroom, we returned to the conference room and receive valuable advice from Guthrie. She said the diversity of broadcasters at CNN make it “more of mosaic rather than just
black and white.” It proves that the news industry does not have a cookie-cutter type but rather looks for diversity and niche expertise.

“Amazing” is the only word that can fully describe the CNN experience. It not only increased my interest in the industry, but also motivated me to grow as a broadcaster now so I am prepared to enter the workplace. CNN certainly set a high mark for the remainder of the trip.

Next Up: The Weather Channel

At The Weather Channel, we heard speeches from several people in different facets of production. Among those that spoke was Nicole Mitchell, one of the morning one-camera talents. While she primary spoke about her past and path to her current position on The Weather Channel, she also offered advice to our group. While she had a great deal of advice, two things really stuck with me. The first: Take all the opportunities you get. Now this may seem fairly elementary, but when you consider the path of a broadcaster, you generally have a set plan of where you see yourself one day. With this in mind, it is easy to see that many people may close doors because they don’t believe it will fit into their “plan,” yet that opportunity may be the launching point for another opening. This piece of advice is pivotal in the industry since it seems the industry is driven by connections, so taking the abundance of opportunities will provide the connections that could potentially launch you into the position of your dreams. Somewhat related was her advice to have goals, but be flexible and keep options open.

Another tip that pretty much every person we met with mentioned is the importance of internships to prepare us for the workplace. Kaye Zusmann, VP of Program Strategy and Development, not only stressed the importance of internships, but also gave some tips for finding a “good” internship. While most may think finding a dream internship in a large market is ideal, she rather suggests finding someplace small since they have fewer resources, thus giving you the opportunity to get more hands-on experience and try new things.

While the presentations were interesting, the real fun was when we were given the chance to appear in front of the green-screen and attempt to give a mock-weather report. I’m a pretty big perfectionist so naturally I was a bit timid to go in front of all my peers and most likely make a fool of myself, but after a couple people stepped up, I was definitely excited to try it myself. When I stepped up, I had to try to get an idea of where everything was on the map. There were two screens on either side of the green-screen in addition to one attached to the camera. It was definitely difficult to orient myself while also trying to verbally explain the picture “behind” me. It certainly gave me a different look into the weather, and while I am not personally destined to be a meteorologist, I definitely had a great time trying my hand at it.

Picture: Mollie Lair, Natalie Virden, and Robert Wohner trying out the green-screen at the Weather Channel.
What did I take away from The Weather Channel? INTERN! They really stressed that, and although I’ve heard it numerous times from teachers and other advisors, hearing it from successful broadcasters and producers makes it that much more poignant.
Atlanta has the coveted position as market eight, making it an elite market. I was certainly excited to visit WSB-TV which is the ABC affiliate in Atlanta. Beth Wright told us about the history of the station and gave us a tour of the newsroom and various studios. The magnitude of the facilities was surprising. I had no idea the studios were so large. Their weather center alone was nearly the size of five Phoenix14 sets placed side-by-side.

After being awed by the WSB-TV facilities, we met with Neil Williamson, Director of Marketing for radio. He offered his thoughts on the future of radio broadcasting as a profession. He said there will be fewer jobs in radio with the emergence of new technologies, so fewer people can produce multiple broadcasts in a short amount of time. I am pursuing television rather than radio, but those Fellows that were exploring possibilities in radio were definitely surprised with this and began to question if a career in radio was a realistic goal. After meeting with Mr. Williamson, we had the opportunity to meet Bill Hoffman, VP and General Manager for WSB-TV. He showed us a recruitment video highlighting the many features of working for WSB-TV. It was a good overview of the station and a nice wrap-up after the tour of the station.
Day 2: Turner Field

Who would ever think a great deal of production went into maintaining the board at a baseball game? Well, after our trip to Turner Field, I am convinced that the production at a baseball game is certainly a profession. The control room was almost identical to those at both CNN and WSB-TV and the production team of around 30 employees proves that this is no simple operation.
It just shows that broadcast jobs can go beyond traditional television and into multiple aspects of entertainment. We not only had the opportunity to visit the control room, but we also had the chance to step on the field and walk the perimeter. We also set foot in the visiting team dugout and had a good time role-playing as if we were professional baseball players. It was a great way to end a terrific trip to Atlanta.

The trip as a whole not only taught me a great deal about the industry but also heightened my interest and desire to succeed as a broadcaster. It certainly has propelled me to make the most of the next four years in hopes of one day reaching the level of success of each of the broadcasters and producers we met. I highly recommend a trip to Atlanta for anyone interesting in communications!

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