My Communication Experience

Where I Started, How I Got Here, and Where I’m Going

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Bryant University Class of 2016

**Where I Started:**

I love to talk, I love to listen, I love to argue, I love to write, and I *love* movies.

During my college search, the choice of my major was easy – communication. Now, I was open to specificity within that realm (Journalism, Writing, Film, Media Studies, Health Communication), but I knew that if I were to dedicate four years of my life preparing myself for a career, that preparation was going to be for a career path where I could put my passions to work.

There are thousands of places around the world where one can choose to pursue an education in the field of communication. I chose to attend Bryant. Why? Well, it was close to home, I could park for free as a freshman, and the campus looked nice. But on top of that, I could learn firsthand from some of the communication discipline’s leading scholars and professionals while also grounding my education in a business background. When looking at my options of where to send my deposit, this reason made the decision all the more simple.

Soon after coming to Bryant, I came to find things were not exactly as I pictured when it came to communication. While the capabilities of the staff and the insight offered through courses were certainly legitimate, I found that students looked at communication majors with indifference and – oftentimes – contempt. As I went through my first semester of freshman year, I constantly heard “really?” as a response to telling people I was a communication major. While Bryant is a respectable institution for the Liberal Arts, I realized early on that the school was still very much owning its label as a business school. Each year, the university sends out hundreds of accountants, financial analysts, and managers into the work force. However, only a few dozen communication majors walk across that stage on graduation day. At that moment, I wondered if I had made a foolish decision to study communication at Bryant University. I decided to not act rashly and instead see my work through. Over the years, I discovered that the real fools were not Bryant’s communication majors, but rather those who underestimated Bryant’s communication majors.

**Where I Am & How I Got Here:**

My freshman year was full of fascinating discoveries in the classroom and from extracurricular experiences. I learned early on to take pride in my major, as it was the first established college major in America. I also found out how much communication majors and professors took ownership of their field of study. Professor Stanley Baran, a proud promoter of the department, always reassured us that we made a smart choice in choosing to study communication, and that with diligent work, great jobs, opportunities, and salaries would be waiting for us. In my perception, communication has the tightest department among all disciplines at the university. This sense of community made me feel more comfortable and confident in my decision to study communication at Bryant.

Now that I’m a senior, I find that I’m eager to enter the workforce and start making significant contributions to the industry. I think this is because I truly believe I took advantage of nearly every opportunity afforded to me by the Department of Communication, starting with activities outside of the classroom. While what we learn in these communication classes is extremely important, I’ve always considered myself to be a hands-on learner. Involvement in Bryant’s communication-related clubs and organizations gave me the opportunity to apply what I’ve learned from textbooks and professors to real-life situations.

I didn’t hold back at all when it came to getting involved in these communication organizations. The first club I sought to join was the Bryant Debaters. I was disappointed when the first meeting showed the club to be a small round-table group that didn’t seem to be as passionate about debate as I was. However, after my first semester, I rose to a leadership position in the club, and I used my influence to take the group to a new level. We started competing in intercollegiate tournaments and took on schools like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. As a team, we worked strongly on our speech organization, vocal clarity, persuasion, and public speaking skills. Eventually, I went on to beat a duo from Princeton, showing how much of a mark I made on the club when I compared debating against an Ivy League school to sitting in a circle discussing simple political issues.

I also decided to take part in the media organizations the campus had to offer. I started shows with the Media Production Club and WJMF Radio – both of which have carried over to my senior year despite numerous changes. This helped me realized that in this field things are rarely static. Coworkers will leave, format will change, and programs sometimes go on hiatus. However, if you wield the skills learned from experience in the field wisely, you can think of a new solution to keep doing what you love.

I also joined The Archway as a staff writer and contributed to the Opinion, Campus News, and Variety sections. Most importantly, The Archway gave me an outlet to write movie reviews. The Archway also presented me with an incredible opportunity my first semester – the chance to attend the National College Media Convention in Chicago. While there were several takeaways from this convention, the biggest was that in order to make it as a professional media writer, a blog was an absolute necessity. After that, every review I wrote ended up on my blog, AJBeltis.Blogspot.com. The site has over 100 finished written pieces and has been viewed over 20,000 times.

Finally, as if four involvements weren’t enough, I decided to join Bryant’s public speaking organization, The Podium. Through The Podium, I’ve taken on a club president role, met some of my best friends, had the opportunity to plan and run events, and made one amazing discovery – I am a great public speaker. I don’t say this to brag, but it’s something I really do take immense pride in. Since being involved with the Podium I have made the finals for the Public Speaking Colloquium three years in a row and won the competition my junior year. I also was given an award by the Department of Communication for my efforts in expanding the presence of public speaking on campus.

I really found my niche at Bryant with public speaking. Aside form my own success in being able to improve my interpersonal and public speaking skills, I’ve simultaneously made an impact on those looking to do the same. Through this club I also got to know our advisor Professor Susan Baran outside of a classroom setting. She went on to become like a mentor to me, and she has guided me on several educational and personal matters.

While I’m thankful for all the experiences I’ve had outside of the classroom at Bryant, I can’t overlook everything I’ve been taught inside the classroom. Since my very first Introduction to Communication class – where I was taught the basics of mass, interpersonal, health, small group, organizational, nonverbal, and many other types of communication – I came to realize just how numerous my options with this degree are. With that realization, I decided I didn’t necessarily want to “specialize” in any one area of communication during my undergraduate studies. Instead, I decided to explore the different routes I could go down with my degree by taking different types of classes.

For interpersonal classes, I took Interpersonal Communication and Argumentation & Persuasion. Interpersonal Communication was an overview of the ways we create, maintain, and end our personal relationships on a daily basis. I came to learn that even though it is crucial to our existence and survival there is so much more to interpersonal communication that most people realize. Argumentation & Persuasion delved into the psychology and study of persuasion within the human mind and exposed me to the various techniques one can use to persuade someone through communication based on the context and the targeted persuadee. Finally, my Sophomore International Experience trip had a focus on intercultural communication, and we were tasked with paying specific attention to the different interpersonal interactions we experienced in the dissimilar cultures of Germany and Spain. This class had a special impact on me, as I love to travel and I now know how to incorporate my academic knowledge in an international setting to be an effective communicator. These classes taught me that interpersonal communication is not simply “talking to people” – it is precise, understandable, and systematic.

While I have come to notice and appreciate interpersonal communication in my daily life, I have always been drawn to the study of mass communication. Because of this, I took Mass Communication, Media Literacy, Broadcast Journalism, and Film Theory: Contemporary Perspectives. My experiences in my Broadcast Journalism class allowed me to work on my production skills behind the cameras and my interview skills in front of them. In the Film Theory class I took while studying abroad, I spent a semester analyzing and discussing films with a room full of like-minded individuals. Obviously, it was one of the greatest academic experiences of my life. I was particularly moved by my Media Literacy class, as it took the introductory ideas taught in the lower-level Mass Communication course and applied them in a larger societal context. I have since become a proponent for media literacy education, and have even wrote and taught a workshop on the subject.

I noticed the remainder of my classes featured an overlap between mass and interpersonal communication. Intro to Health Communication focused on everything from health campaigns and advertisements to patient/provider interaction in hospitals and doctors’ offices and introduced me to several ideas of jobs I may pursue after graduation. My Communication Research Methods class required me to work with a team to conduct an original research project. While ours had an interpersonal focus, the topics the class studied also ranged from purely interpersonal and purely mass, with some projects landing somewhere in between. Finally, my Senior Seminar in Communication Theory class equally divided readings and assignments on both mass and interpersonal discussions, giving us greater insight on the findings in both of these areas.

I believe the overlap in classes like these represents the trend of world as we see it. The separate realms of mass and interpersonal communication are blending together in several ways due to social media, where individuals interact and form/maintain relationships even though it is through a mediated channel. Taking classes that incorporated both a mass and an interpersonal element better prepared me for many of the responsibilities I’ll be faced with in the work force and in my personal life.

Finally, I’ve held several professional positions in the industry during my time at Bryant. I started working at Koffler Communication Complex my sophomore year as a TV Studio Production Assistant in the Student Media Services department. The role exposed me to professional media and filming equipment and their proper use and setup. I also had a semester-long internship at WPRI-TV in Providence as a Digital News Intern. I worked with news professionals and enhanced my writing skills by covering some of the most pressing stories in the city of Providence during the late winter and early spring of 2014. The work I did covered politics, health, consumer crises, crime, school lockdowns, and even bomb scares. I also did some digital content creation for photo blogs, clipped the news broadcast for online viewing, and ran the teleprompter for the live news broadcast. Every single day of the internship was enthralling – all week long I would look forward to my two days in the newsroom to see what would happen next. It was also a tremendous learning experience that gave me connections, knowledge of the industry, and hands on experience doing something I love.

However, neither of these experiences compare to my two summers at the National Student Leadership Conference (NSLC) on Journalism, Film, & Media Arts as a Team Advisor. In this role, I employed my understanding of mass communication concepts but embraced them in a setting where strong interpersonal skills were key. The job entailed leading a small group of 12-17 high school students and creating an environment where they felt comfortable yet challenged to take an academic risk. This called on me to hone in on my leadership, interpersonal, and group communication skills.

Outside of these small group tasks, I ran seminars and taught classes about broadcast journalism, ethics, media literacy, and video production for hundreds of young aspiring media professionals – all of which required a rich understanding of many media-related concepts and practices. All of these workshops and classes required my direct input, and I even wrote the workshop on media literacy that was taught to hundreds of teenagers who may go on to influence the communication industry one day. The entire experience was not only fully rewarding on a personal level, but it also expanded my overall communication skills immensely.

Looking back on all I’ve accomplished, I feel I am ready to enter the world and show them what I can do. Now obviously my professional experience is limited, I’m young, and I don’t have a connection to get me anywhere I want to be, but I do have a portfolio, a blog, and a communication degree from Bryant University. That may not be everything, but it’s enough to give me a start to bigger and better things.

**Where I Am Going:**

At the time I write this paper I am 174 days away from graduating Bryant University with a B.S. in Communication and Business Administration with a Marketing concentration. I feel like many people assume college students are petrified of graduating, but I’m ready.

I look back on all of my communication experiences during my four years at Bryant – personal, professional, educational, and extracurricular – and I’m awed by how much I’ve done and seen. I’m excited to see what the future holds for me and what opportunities exist for someone like me. But to be honest, I don’t have a clear idea of what that future is just yet. Maybe I’ll be a film critic or a film producer. Maybe I’ll work in TV, for radio, or both. Maybe I’ll write, blog, or speak. I could be a teacher or an office worker. Maybe I’ll go to grad school, and maybe I wont. But with my degree, my knowledge, and my drive, all of these possible routes are just a handful of things I can do with my life following what I have learned and done at Bryant.

Of course, there’s always the extremely legitimate possibility that I’ll be told “no” several times, and that’s okay. That simply means I haven’t worked hard enough for it yet or it isn't the right fit for me. These moments of failure exist to push me to expand my knowledge and capabilities even further. Fortunately, in the realm of communication, there’s always something new to learn, something groundbreaking to hear about, and something captivating to discuss. And like the world of communication, I adapt, I can change with the times, I have plenty of others who will work alongside me, and people can sometimes underestimate the power of influence I have in the world around me.

Let’s see what happens.