Summer Internships in the Students’ Own Words

FROM MANHATTAN to Moscow, students at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism continued to break new ground with their summer internship experiences. This past summer, students from the Class of 2009 forged relationships with new internship partners, including Al Jazeera English and WRXP-FM in New York; WKBW-TV in Buffalo, The Times of India in Mumbai, Reuters in Brussels, and the Associated Press in Moscow. They also worked with familiar employers such as NBC Local Integrated Media, The New York Times, and WNYC radio.

“Employers continue to compliment our students on their work,” said William Chang, the J-School’s director of career services. “I’m already looking forward to seeing where the next class will land internships.”

The paid summer internship program is a unique feature of the CUNY J-School. As part of the curriculum, all students work as interns for professional media organizations between the second and third semesters.

The practical work experience is its own reward, and it becomes a huge plus when new graduates make their way into the job market. But the School makes the deal even sweeter by guaranteeing all interns are paid at least $3,000 for 10 or 12 weeks of labor.

Twice during the summer, students are required to file reports with the J-School on their internship adventures. What follows are excerpts from some of the Class of ’09 reports.

Aisha Al-Muslim, WKBW-TV, Buffalo

At several media conventions I attended, journalists warned that their business was changing. I could see some of the signs during my summer internship at WKBW-TV in Buffalo. On a Sunday night, only a director of operations and a producer were in the control room. I expected at least eight people like I saw at my internship at WABC-TV in New York City.

At WKBW, the director preprogrammed the camera shots and was in charge of operating the cameras during the show. But it wasn’t always like that. Management had made the decision to cut production jobs in order to reduce spending. That same night, what was supposed to be the 11 o’clock news was pre-taped because management was concerned that if an NBA Finals game went into overtime, they would have to pay employees overtime.

I learned that the radio scanners are one way the assignment editors decide what should be covered. On the first day of my internship, a message came on the scanner about a ‘Mercy Flight.’ I was told it meant that a serious accident just occurred because a Mercy Flight is called when an emergency involves a head injury.

Another time a message came over the scanner about a bank robbery at a KeyBank in Williamsville, a wealthy neighborhood in the greater Buffalo area. A reporter and a photographer were sent out and I tagged along. We listened to the scanner as we drove to the location of the robbery to find out who the police were looking for, descriptions of the armed gunman, and the status of locating him.

I found that being able to listen to over 10 scanners going off at the same time could be an asset to any station. Most people in the newsroom can’t decipher the messages sent over the radio. If I learned to do it as a reporter, I would be a tremendous help to any assignment editor.

I have learned over time that newsrooms all over the country make different ethical decisions. At the station where I interned, Facebook and Myspace were used only to help locate a subject, but information or pictures accessible on the page were not used in any story. I think this is a smart precautionary decision because anyone can be whoever he or she wants to be online. When I went out in the field with a crew, I learned that you should not shoot on private property without permission, unless it is a shot of the door knocker. Also it is best to avoid shooting license plates because they can identify people who might not be relevant.

My internship at WKBW-TV was an eye-opening experience into how a smaller newsroom works in comparison to a larger market like New York City.

Nicholas Martinez, NBC News, New York

I have learned that being able to listen to over 10 scanners going off at the same time could be an asset to any station. Most people in the newsroom can’t decipher the messages sent over the radio. If I learned to do it as a reporter, I would be a tremendous help to any assignment editor.

I have learned over time that newsrooms all over the country make different ethical decisions. At the station where I interned, Facebook and Myspace were used only to help locate a subject, but information or pictures accessible on the page were not used in any story. I think this is a smart precautionary decision because anyone can be whoever he or she wants to be online. When I went out in the field with a crew, I learned that you should not shoot on private property without permission, unless it is a shot of the door knocker. Also it is best to avoid shooting license plates because they can identify people who might not be relevant.

My internship at WKBW-TV was an eye-opening experience into how a smaller newsroom works in comparison to a larger market like New York City.

Nicholas C. Martinez, NBC News, New York

My experiences at NBC ranged from the mundane to the exciting: from logging b-roll for a story on a cancer research to chasing down flight attendants at Newark Airport all the while streaming live video back to the WNBC control room.

I covered former President George H.W. Bush’s ritual birthday skydive, pitched stories to NBC Nightly News, WNBC, and the ‘Today’ Show, and even bumped into Late Night’s Jimmy Fallon in the NBC hallways — literally.

What will I remember most? Well, I had a chance to lunch with a Nightly News correspondent at a Friendly’s in Connecticut — and he paid the bill.

Here’s the story: Ron Allen pitched a story about Muslim Americans’ reactions to President Obama’s speech in Cairo in June. I was asked to help him research mosques in Newark, NJ. He found a Muslim family in Connecticut who produced religious sensitivity and awareness videos for law enforcement and medical institutions nationwide. Since I helped them do research on the couple and log video for snappy quotes, he and his producer Carla Marcus brought me along to Hartford as Ron worked his magic. He interviewed the couple in their home and shadowed them as they attended Friday prayers at their local mosque.

It was a day of firsts for me: I ended up taking the first yellow taxicab ride of my life. I attended my first Muslim prayer service (shoes off I might add,) and I had a look at the behind-the-scenes work that went into producing a Nightly News spot.

The story turned out great (it aired on the Weekend Nightly News) and I had a chance to pick the brain of a very accomplished reporter and producer. He answered all of my questions and gave me valuable insight into the world of a traveling foreign correspondent. He’s a good man, someone I am proud to say that I worked with.

And I don’t say that only because he bought me lunch.

Please turn to Page 5
Finding New Ways to Connect With Applicants

IT WAS A TYPICAL DAY at the CUNY J-School: a class in news photography in one room, a freelance workshop in another. Or was it? The month was August, not a time school is normally in session. And none of the 50 or so students was even enrolled. They were all applicants to the J-School’s Class of 2011.

The two special seminars were among seven included in August Academy, a first-time production of the Office of Admissions & Students Affairs. The admissions department is always looking for new ways to reach out to prospective students and the 2009 August Academy — modeled on the successful January Academy enrichment series for students — was one of several innovative programs added to the recruitment calendar this year.

“August Academy is meant to kick off a long-term relationship with applicants,” said Admissions Director Stephen Dougherty. “It involves bringing them into our community to give them a first-hand understanding of the CUNY J-School experience.”

Though fall is the traditional recruiting season, the CUNY J-School’s outreach starts well before then. Admissions staffers have been wracking up frequent flier miles covering reporters’ conferences, professional meetings, and graduate school fairs both at home and abroad all year.

Last March, a delegation of students, faculty, and staff attended the South by Southwest Interactive Festival in Austin, Tex. While the admissions people were manning an information booth, the others were out reporting on the event and the city of Austin for a new web feature called Road Trip (roadtrip.journalism.cuny.edu).

Since then, whenever a team from the J-School has gone on an out-of-town trip, such as to the Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum in Bonn, Germany in June or the National Association of Black Journalists’ annual convention in Tampa, Fla. in August, they’ve showcased their work on the Road Trip site.

“Such activities have helped raise the J-School’s profile with potential students on the national and international stage,” Dougherty said.

The added recruitment efforts have supplemented monthly information sessions at the J-School as well as invitations for prospective students to sit in on classes and hear guest speakers. The admissions office keeps them informed of application deadlines and special events through an email newsletter it sends out several times a year.

School officials hope the extra outreach will pay off with more record-setting enrollment numbers. With 81 students, the Class of 2010 is nearly 40% larger than the 2009 group that will graduate in December. Early signs are encouraging for the Class of 2011. Applications are running well ahead of where they were a year ago.

Brown and Evans Chosen as Honorees for Next J-School Gala

ONE OF THE MOST formidable couples in the news business will receive Lifetime Achievement Awards from the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism next spring.

On May 10, 2010, the School will honor Tina Brown, editor of The Daily Beast, and author Harold Evans for their long careers in journalism both in England and the U.S.

Brown has served as editor of The Tatler magazine, Vanity Fair, and The New Yorker, which won five Overseas Press Club Awards, four George Polk awards, and 10 National Magazine Awards during her six-year tenure. Since leaving The New Yorker in 1998, she created Talk magazine, wrote the 2007 bestselling biography, The Diana Chronicles, about the late Diana, Princess of Wales, hosted CNBC’s Topic A with Tina Brown, and last year founded The Daily Beast, a topical web site that offers original content along with stories, blogs, and videos from around the Internet.

Evans dropped out of school at age 15 to become a reporter in World War II-era Britain. He worked for many years as editor of The Sunday Times in London, where he quickly became known as a champion of investigative journalism. Evans later became the founding editor of Condé Nast Traveler magazine and worked as editorial director and president of Random House. His new memoir, My Paper Chase, recounts his adventures in journalism and has just been released.

Queen Elizabeth knighted Evans in 2004 and bestowed the title Commander of the British Empire on Brown in 2000 for his service to journalism.

Last year, the CUNY J-School’s second annual Awards for Excellence in Journalism honored broadcast journalist Barbara Walters. The event grossed nearly $350,000, most of which was used for student scholarships.
DELEGATION from the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism delivered a hopeful message about the future of the news business to the Aspen Institute’s annual Forum on Communications and Society (FOCAS) in August. Initial research from the J-School’s New Business Models for News Project shows financially viable options for gathering and disseminating news that could fill the void in markets where local newspapers fold up shop.

The project, funded by the Knight Foundation, “is exploring what happens to journalism in a city when a daily newspaper disappears,” said lead presenter Jeff Jarvis, director of the CUNY J-School’s interactive program. “Will there be a market demand for journalism? Can the market meet this demand? And who will pay for the journalism we need? These are business questions and so we sought business answers in conducting our research,” Dean Stephen B. Shepard and Associate Dean Judith Watson accompanied Jarvis to the Aspen conference. (See Dean’s Corner, page 3.)

Out of the research came the construction of complete business models that CUNY is sharing with the journalists, communities, entrepreneurs, technologists, and investors. The future, Jarvis predicted, will no longer be dominated by a single entity, such as a large daily newspaper. Instead a metro market will evolve into an ecosystem made up of many players with varying motives, means, and models, working collaboratively in networks.

Hyperlocal blogs are the building blocks for community coverage. The building blocks of that ecosystem are hyperlocal blogs, which now number in the thousands, according to the hyperlocal network outside.in. “The most startling and hopeful number we found in our survey of local sites,” said Jarvis, “is that some hyperlocal bloggers, serving markets of about 50,000 people, are already bringing in up to $200,000 a year in advertising. After three years we project that a blogger could hire editorial staff and advertising help – citizen salespeople who help support advertising revenue – and make a three-figure income.”

The project also modeled a New News Organization (NNO) – the successor to the traditional newspaper – that covers city-wide stories, provides the best reporting that will remain the lifeblood of local journalism, and works collaboratively with many in the community. It is the largest member of the ecosystem but, with a staff of 100 instead of 1,000, it is much smaller than the old newspaper and has shed costs for printing and distribution. “That’s why our model shows that it can be a profitable and sustainable enterprise,” Jarvis said.

There are more contributors to the metro news ecosystem: technology and sales support organizations that enable these players to operate as part of ad and content networks (the project also modeled a company that could perform these services); publicly supported and not-for-profit entities; transparency of government actions and information (critical to enabling any citizen to become a watchdog); national networks, and the inestimable but invaluable force of volunteers who freely contribute to public knowledge.

Adding this all together, the models project sustainable journalism of scale but also envision great potential for growth, especially if journalists learn to take advantage of the social engagement the Internet enables. “That’s ultimately how new news companies can maximize their value,” Jarvis noted. Next steps for the project include refining the models, researching local advertising further, exploring the link economy, and hosting a conference on November 11 at the J-School. “I’m an optimist,” said Jarvis. “Look at all the new opportunities there are to gather and share news in new ways, to expand and improve it, to change journalism’s relationship with its public and make it collaborative, to find new efficiencies and lower costs and thus to return to profitability and sustainability. It’s an exciting time for journalism.”

Go to newsinnovation.com for the latest on the New Business Models for News Project. Download the new business models spreadsheets at newsinnovation.com/models.

DEAN’S CORNER

Reporting On a New Journalistic Ecosystem

I was Friday, February 20 — one of those bright, cold New York winter mornings. Just before heading to the subway, I checked my e-mails on my Blackberry. The one that immediately caught my eye was from Alberto Ibargüen, president of the Knight Foundation.

“I was talking with Walter Isaacson (President of the Aspen Institute) at dinner last night and he suggested that… we should tackle exploration and development of biz models [for journalism]… I said I was interested in supporting and suggested we do this w/you and CUNY. Interested?”

Elated, I quickly thumbed back.

“Are we interested?” Yes. Yes. Yes. It would be a dream come true to work on this with everyone… Alberto, thanks for keeping us in mind….”

We quickly formed a team headed by Jeff Jarvis, director of the interactive program at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism and a leading thinker about the future of journalism. We asked ourselves these questions: What would happen if a major metropolitan daily was no longer able to perform the civic functions of a newspaper in a community? What would replace it?

Actually, we had been thinking for a long time about how to support quality journalism in this new digital age. We had run conferences on the subject, we had received a $3 million challenge grant from the Tow Foundation to set up a Center for Journalistic Innovation, and we had been working with The New York Times, our next-door neighbor, on a hyperlocal news project in the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn, supported in part by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. It wasn’t enough, we knew, to provide quality journalism. We had to find ways to pay for it in a sustainable way.

After much discussion back and forth with Knight (thanks Eric Newton) and the Aspen Institute (thanks Charlie Freeston), we agreed to develop business plans, including detailed spreadsheets based on various assumptions, for two broad scenarios: (1) providing news to a local neighborhood and (2) for a major metropolitan area. The goal: present preliminary plans to a select audience of 50 at the Aspen Institute in August.

Armed with a five-month, $250,000 grant from Knight, we hired staff; Peter Hauck, an experienced media executive who had worked with Professor Jarvis at the Newhouse chain of newspapers, Jennifer McFadden, a spreadsheet-savvy analyst who had worked at The New York Times; two of our own recent graduates, Matt Sollars and Damian Ghigliotty; and several graduate students from the Field Center for Entrepreneurship at CUNY’s Baruch College, Myphon Media, a well-known consultant, helped with the spreadsheets.

As a first step, we surveyed more than 110 local web sites or blogs that were successfully serving local communities or cities. Some of them were supported by foundations, like Voice of San Diego, MinnPost, and the New Haven Independent. But others were self-supporting: Baristanet.com in Montclair N.J., West SeattleBlog.com, The Arizona Guardian, and Sun Valley Online. Many of them shared crucial data with us: how big an audience, how much they charged for ads, what they paid reporters and sales people, how much they earned. Yes, earned. Many of them were nicely profitable while providing valuable news to a community that was actively involved in covering themselves. In short, by collaborating with their communities, they were creating both a journalistic and business model.

Flash forward to August. There we were in Aspen, with 200-page books loaded with spreadsheet sheets and business plans. We proposed a new journalistic ecosystem that had four main players:

• A New News Organization staffed by professional journalists.
• A network of local bloggers covering various aspects of a community, from schools and housing to health and crime.
• A service-providing framework that would offer sales support and networking opportunities.
• Non-profit groups in the community, such as a local NPR radio station.

To and behold, our models showed that bloggers could support themselves with local and networked ads, events, and e-commerce. The New News Organization (NNO), as we fondly called it could have double-digit profit margins.

Yes, the NNO would be smaller and have lower revenues than an existing local newspaper, but its cost structure would be much leaner, creating nice margins. By collaborating with local bloggers and sites, the NNO would be deeply rooted in the community, providing a form of hyperlocal content that traditional newspapers don’t offer. And it would open up a source of hyperlocal revenue from local and regional advertisers that could be networked.

Over two days, the participants pored over our models, offered criticisms, made suggestions. Some disagreed with our conclusions, but pretty soon everybody was talking about journalistic ecosystems and New News Organizations. We are now refining our models, working toward a deadline of January 31 for our final report. All of our work is available for scrutiny and comment on a special web site, newsinnovation.com. We’d love to hear from you.

STEPHEN B. SHEPARD
DEAN, CUNY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM
We are extremely grateful to many friends for their generous support of the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, the only public graduate journalism school in the Northeast. Our first major gift came to us from the door of our new school opened in 2006. It was a $4 million scholarship fund in honor of Arthur Ochs ‘Punch’ Sulzberger, publisher of The New York Times from 1963 to 1992, by his sisters Judith Sulzberger, Marian Heiskell, and Ruth Holmberg.

Since then, the Sulzberger sisters have been joined by many other wonderful and generous donors — individuals, foundations, and corporations — who have stepped forward to support us with contributions for our unique paid summer internship program and student scholarships. Such donors have helped make possible for our diverse student body to receive a world-class graduate journalism education. As we approach our four-year anniversary, the CUNY Graduate School is well on its way to meeting a $3 million challenge grant to fund The Low Center for Journalism Innovation. The Center offers a fresh perspective and interdisciplinary approach to solving the problems of journalism in America.

Because we are a young school without a strong alumni base, we have established The Future Journalists Program, to encourage career journalists and others to invest in our students — the journalists of tomorrow — by supporting our summer internship program and student scholarships for students in need. For more information on this program, please contact Diana Robertson, director of development, at 646-758-8114 or send an email to diana.robertson@cuny.edu.
Students Report on their Summer Internships

Rima Abdelkader, Al Jazeera, English, New York

Al JAZEERA ENGLISH is the first English-language world news channel headquartered in Qatar. The channel aims to give voice to untold stories, promote debate, and challenge established perceptions. It was launched in November 2006 and has broadcast centers in Doha, Kuala Lumpur, London, and Washington, DC.

This channel is not to be confused with Al Jazeera, the first independent Arabic news channel in the world that was launched 12 years ago. I’ve noticed that explaining this difference has been a challenge for AlJazEng reporters and producers. During the war in Iraq, former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld accused the Arabic channel of “vicious, inaccurate, and inexcusable” reports about the war, which has left many in the West with the impression that Al Jazeera English disseminates misinformation and panders to one side.

Al Jazeera English in New York works on packages and live feeds from our Reuters office in Times Square to our office at the United Nations. I was tasked with covering business and international news, helping produce packages, manning the Reuters office or UN office at times, creating a list of sources for our NY correspondent for future stories, as well as going outside with our cameraman and interviewing people on a range of topics, such as the 50th anniversary of the Apollo moon landing.

Finding sources for broadcast stories took a great deal of patience. Sometimes, I’d only have a short amount of time to research the topic, find a suitable person, and see if that person would be available to come in that day for a couple of minutes. It was definitely a great challenge to see how much I could handle.

Collin Orcutt, SI.com

My internship at Sports Illustrated’s web site has been more than I could have hoped for. I ate lunch with Terry McDonell, the magazine’s editor, was assigned various video projects, and overall was treated like a regular employee rather than an intern. Most of my last month was spent in the field, where I was able to work out of my own home, report in my own neighborhood, and pitch ideas that I could then decide how best to execute using my own journalistic judgment.

Some packages I handled were video story packages pulled from the archives or my own creative voice. Unlike other internships, they trusted me to make my own decisions and use my journalistic judgment. The majority of my current content is text and I could then decide how best to execute using my own journalistic judgment.

The first post I wrote during the summer was an undergraduate student who didn’t receive her Nobel Prize, but who had won an award for her research. It was a story that I felt I could tell better than anyone else, and I was able to work on the story all summer long. It was a great experience for me, and one that I will not soon forget.

The New York Times


It’s amazing what a difference six words can make. Being able to say, “I’m from The New York Times” has opened up access and opportunities for me that student journalists often don’t have.

The name recognition was not even the best part of my internship. It felt great to get back into the routine of writing and reporting. My first article was on Rudyard Kipling and the children’s book market. I think my major strength as an intern was that I was willing to talk with people about poems and stories, and how they handle writing stories on deadline. They introduced me to people and let me see the finished product afterward (before it was inevitably edited down). The fun part was, I could follow around reporters from sections I normally wouldn’t have anything to do with. I took a day to go to a tennis match with one of the sports reporters. I would never do that in the U.S.

Jenni Avins, Saveur, New York

I know from experience that any book can help, however tenuous it might be. So, I thought, this is a food magazine — June is National Dairy Month. I came from a long line of dairy farmers, and my mom has always collected Elsie the Cow memorabilia. Elsie, a dairy-necked Jersey cow, has been Borden Dairy’s mascot since the 1930s.

I pitched a nostalgic look at Elsie’s career, which Web Editor Katie Cancila loved. I wrote it up for the web, and Katie ended up holding it, thinking it might have a place in the magazine. When I spoke to Dana Bowen, the magazine’s executive editor, about the story, I told her how I had written the piece as a sort of distant, nostalgic, retrospective look at Elsie.

Then, I told her a little bit more about my mom and my experience reporting the story. It turns out my great grandfather, a Swiss dairy farmer, was exhibiting at the 1933 World’s Fair where the original Elsie was “discovered.” Dana was thrilled with this connection and wanted to know more about my mother’s Elsie collection and my family’s farm.

What’s special about Saveur is that a personal connection to a subject is seen as valuable, rather than problematic, as often is the case in journalism. It’s funny because I’ve spent so much energy in school working to take myself out of the story, and then Dana advised me to put myself back in. (The Elsie piece ran in Saveur’s October 2009 issue.)
New Yorker Editor Sees Solid Support For His Brand of Journalism

David Remnick, editor of *The New Yorker* magazine since 1998, exhorted CUNY J-School students to veer away from the famous and instead sharpen their investigative skills because “that is what the country needs most of all from its journalists.”

He made the remarks in a conversation Sept. 22 with Dean Stephen B. Shepard before a packed house of 150 in the J-School newsroom. Remnick was the first guest speaker to appear as part of the 2009-2010 Brown Bag Speaker Series, which brings prominent journalists to the School for an informal audience with students, alumni, faculty, and staff. The appearances are often scheduled during lunchtime — hence, the name.

Remnick, who is writing a book on President Barack Obama, has covered his share of famous people, from Pope John Paul II to boxer Muhammad Ali. Yet he spoke of how difficult it is to write something original or deep about someone who is practiced at keeping reporters at bay.

He’d much rather see young journalists put their efforts into the painstaking process “that reaps Abu Ghraib and the Pentagon Papers. That kind of reporting is absolutely essential to keeping power honest.”

“People don’t want as much, it will be a hell of a lot harder,” he said.

Remnick noted. “I cannot avert my eyes while others shift the burden from the print mode for it — and it’s already happening in some ways — to the web. In terms of the skills, the actually more about Iran, for example, because of the web.”

“Inspiring,” Remnick added, is enormously important. “I think what we do.”

Readers so far agree with this approach, supporting the magazine with a phenomenal 85% subscription renewal rate. What’s more, with the number of college-educated adults continuing to grow, Remnick said, more people “want what it is we do.”

“People want what it is we do.”

Remnick addressed a lunchtime crowd in the J-School newsroom.”

David Remnick addresses a lunchtime crowd in the J-School newsroom. The New Yorker magazine since 1998, exhorted CUNY J-School students to veer away from the famous and instead sharpen their investigative skills because “that is what the country needs most of all from its journalists.”

He made the remarks in a conversation Sept. 22 with Dean Stephen B. Shepard before a packed house of 150 in the J-School newsroom. Remnick was the first guest speaker to appear as part of the 2009-2010 Brown Bag Speaker Series, which brings prominent journalists to the School for an informal audience with students, alumni, faculty, and staff. The appearances are often scheduled during lunchtime — hence, the name.

Remnick, who is writing a book on President Barack Obama, has covered his share of famous people, from Pope John Paul II to boxer Muhammad Ali. Yet he spoke of how difficult it is to write something original or deep about someone who is practiced at keeping reporters at bay.

He’d much rather see young journalists put their efforts into the painstaking process “that reaps Abu Ghraib and the Pentagon Papers. That kind of reporting is absolutely essential to keeping power honest.”

“People don’t want as much, it will be a hell of a lot harder,” he said.

Remnick noted. “I cannot avert my eyes while others shift the burden from the print mode for it — and it’s already happening in some ways — to the web. In terms of the skills, the actually more about Iran, for example, because of the web.”

“Inspiring,” Remnick added, is enormously important. “I think what we do.”

Readers so far agree with this approach, supporting the magazine with a phenomenal 85% subscription renewal rate. What’s more, with the number of college-educated adults continuing to grow, Remnick said, more people “want what it is we do.”

“People want what it is we do.”