

FACTORS INFLUENCING OCCUPATIONAL COMMITMENT AMONG STUDENTS
PURSUING CAREERS IN JOURNALISM

by

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated factors that influenced students' decisions to pursue a journalism career and their commitment to the field. Students from two Alabama universities were surveyed. A quantitative analysis was used to analyze factors that explained students' decision to pursue journalism and their commitment to the field based on three types of occupational motivation -- affective, normative and continuance motivation. Statistical analysis compared factors of decisions to pursue and commitment among students whose emphasis of study was journalism and students studying in other areas of communication and enrolled in journalism classes. Findings revealed that student perceptions about the current health of the journalism industry were not influential in their decisions to pursue journalism or their commitment to the field compared to other factors such as journalist skills like writing, reporting, etc., and perceptions of the media, salary expectations and involvement in journalism activities in high school and college.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The journalism profession is undergoing constant change. In the worst job market to date, journalists face more competition and need more skills than ever before to succeed in finding and staying in a job in this industry. Over the last three years, the United States Labor Force unemployment rate has increased significantly. It rose from 4.9 percent in 2007 to 7.2 percent in 2008, and to 9.8 percent in 2009. According to the Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates, in 2009 the number of journalism and mass communication graduates who had at least one job offer when they completed their degree fell to 61.9 from 71.5 percent in 2008. Ten years ago, in 2000, 82.4 percent of graduates had at least one job offer. The level of full-time employment for journalism and mass communication graduates in 2009 was 55.5 percent, a significant drop from 60.4 percent the previous year. This was the lowest level of full-time employment recorded since 1986 (Becker et al., 2009). With the weakened economy and the changes journalism continues to face, it is important to look at what motivates students to continue to pursue journalism as a field of study and as a career.

In search of the factors that predict students' occupational commitment to journalism, this study seeks better understanding about the extent to which concern about the current health of the news industry is influencing commitment to the journalism field among those who will soon enter the workforce. It also seeks to better understand how exposure to journalism through early experiences and

training during high school and college influence commitment to the journalism field. This study should shed light on previous research regarding journalism education and journalism careers. This study should benefit communications professionals, students and educators by identifying predictors of commitment to journalism. By better understanding what motivates students to pursue studies in journalism and journalism careers, both employers and educators can use this knowledge to their advantage in helping students stay committed to working in the profession for the long term.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section starts with a brief review of the history of journalism education and enrollment rates, in order to provide some context for students' socialization to the field. The lit review then moves to discussions of students' perceptions of the field, and to predictors of job satisfaction and commitment to journalism, among students and among others. Lastly, the concept of "occupational commitment" is discussed more thoroughly.

Journalism education and enrollment: a look back

Journalism education in the United States started with on-the-job training, not formal classroom education. During the 1700s up to the early 1860s, "journalists learned skills in printing through apprenticeships (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986, 1991). Early training placed greater emphasis on skill and experience. Not all writers received formal education but drew on their knowledge about people and public affairs through life experiences (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991, [4]).

Following the Civil War, Gen. Robert E. Lee started printing classes in 1869 at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Va. (Baker, 1954; Sutton, 1945; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991; Williams, 1929). Other universities shortly followed. Classes were taught by former newspaper reporters (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991). Early classes were taught in English departments (Baker, 1954). In 1908 the first school of journalism was established at the University of Missouri (Becker et al., 1987; Sloan, 1990; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991; Winfield, 2008). Early courses

emphasized training in writing and editing (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991), but because the school began offering conceptual courses, in principles of journalism, news-gathering, newspaper administration, ethics, history, correspondence, newspaper jurisprudence, the law of libel and newspaper making, the field of journalism was recognized as a profession by the University of Missouri (Sloan, 1990; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991; Weaver et al., 2007; Winfield, 2008). The University of Missouri created a pattern that many journalism programs in the United States would follow (Winfield, 2008). On September 14, 1908, the first issue of the University Missourian was published. The publication served as lab where students could learn the craft, and provided editorial interpretation, raising questions on public issues (Winfield, 2008).

Beginning in the 1920s, several independent schools were formed, while journalism departments were created within liberal arts colleges across the country. Partly due to the creation of journalism programs, journalism moved from being recognized as a trade to being recognized as a profession, focused on providing a more conceptual liberal arts education within the context of social sciences, economics, history and philosophy (Peterson, 1960; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991). In 1927, Willard G. Bleyer created a journalism minor in the political science and sociology doctoral programs at the University of Wisconsin. Scholars who founded some of the country's major journalism programs came out of the journalism minor Ph.D. program, embracing Bleyer's belief that journalism should be integrated with the social sciences. As a result, journalism schools began placing more emphasis on systematic methods of observing and analyzing the world, encouraging

establishment of journalism and mass communication research (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991). With the increase in the number of journalism departments and schools in the United States, enrollment numbers increased throughout the 20th century and continue to do so in the 21st century. The increase in enrollment numbers over the decades is arguably related to the idea that “journalism’s emergence in the academic world was part of a great surge in education for the professions” (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991; Weaver et al., 2007).

Four-year programs in journalism increased from four in 1910, to 28 in 1920, to 54 in 1927. In 1910 these programs produced fewer than 25 graduates a year, but by 1927, this number rose to 931. In 1971 the Johnstone survey of U.S. journalists reported that 36,697 undergraduate and graduate students claimed journalism as a major and 7,968 degrees had been awarded with more than 200 universities offering programs in journalism (Weaver et al., 2007; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991). By 1982, numbers increased to 91,016 journalism and mass communication majors and 20,355 degrees granted (Peterson, 1982; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991; Weaver et al., 2007). By 2002, a total of 463 journalism and mass communication degree programs reported that 194,500 students were enrolled in both undergraduate and graduate programs, and 45,939 degrees had been awarded (Weaver et al., 2007).

More recent enrollment numbers indicate a continued growth among journalism programs, despite economic downturn. But the numbers should slow in the coming years due to a decline in the number of freshman and sophomore students enrolled in journalism programs in 2008 compared to enrollment rates in

2007. According to Becker et al., (2009) a weakened economy results in lower enrollment numbers; many choose to enter the work force than to delay entry for the purpose of continuing education. However, if an individual loses a job, the circumstance provides an opportunity to go back to school to further training with the hope of being better prepared to re-enter the workforce, suggesting graduate enrollments will continue to increase.

But the weakened economy did not slow the overall growth in journalism and mass communication programs in the United States in 2008 (Becker et al., 2008; Becker et al., 2009). In the fall of 2009, 215, 296 students were enrolled in journalism and mass communication programs, 200,639 in undergraduate programs and 14,657 in graduate programs. In the fall of 2008, 216,369 enrolled in journalism and mass communication programs, with 201,477 pursuing an undergraduate degree and 14,892 pursuing a graduate degree, a total enrollment increase of 0.8% from 2007. In 2007-2008 a total of 55,056 degrees were awarded, a 2.2% increase from the previous year. Undergraduate enrollments have grown steadily since 1995, and in the fall of 2008 that number was larger than ever (Becker et al., 2008; Becker et al., 2009).

Students' general perceptions of Journalism

Numerous studies indicate that students' perceptions of journalism have remained stable over the years (Bowers, 1974, Endres & Wearden, 1990; Dodd & Tipton, 1992; Wu, 2000). Some early studies indicated that students viewed

journalism as a profession with little financial reward attached to it. Students perceived this as a negative, reporting that pressure of the job is high and opportunities for advancement limited (Weigle, 1957; Lubell, 1959; Kimball & Lubell, 1960; Bowers, 1974). However, participants tended to regard the journalism profession as useful to society (Weigle, 1957; Fosdick & Greenberg, 1961). More than 30 years later, studies have indicated similar findings (Smith, 1987; Dodd & Tipton, 1992; Adams, Brunner & Fitch-Hausser, 2008).

Dodd & Tipton (1992) discuss the shifting views among journalism students, pointing out that the majority of previous studies used the term “journalism” in the context of print, making a case for the use of the term ‘communications,’ saying the term reflects the broadened scope of the profession. As journalism programs have grown to include more offerings such as broadcast and online, and public relations and advertising departments have grown as well, student perceptions and motivations have changed based on the specific areas of study. For example, Endres & Wearden (1990) report that as a whole, students choose careers in journalism and mass communication for the opportunities available for promotion and advancement, contributions made to society and salary, but that there are significant differences among sequences. Traditional print students have said journalism is useful to society and credible with the public even though the pay is low, the job is stressful and there is little room for advancement (Smith, 1987; Enders & Wearden, 1990). But both advertising students and public relations students were motivated to pursue careers because of job opportunities and good pay (Brinkman & Jugenhiemer, 1977; Eneders & Weaver, 1990). One early study

indicated advertising students have tended not to view the profession as credible with the public and think they will need to sacrifice ethics to be successful (Surlin, 1977). A more recent study conducted in 2009 supports these ideas, that students perceive a lack of credibility in the public relations profession (Bowen, 2009).

Pursuing Journalism

When motivations for pursuing journalism first began to be examined, print publications were the dominant form of media. In the 1950s and 1960s research primarily focused on the reasons students chose *not* to pursue careers in newspaper journalism (Weigle, 1957; Dodd & Tipton, 1992). A sizeable increase in enrollment numbers in the 1970s led Thomas Bowers (1974) to explore student attitudes toward journalism as a career. Since then, research has emphasized journalism as a possible career choice among students.

Motivations

Reasons students choose to enter the field of journalism vary, but some of the top factors have remained the same throughout almost 60 years of study. According to numerous studies, the desire and ability to write continues to be a driving motivation for students to pursue journalism (Lubell, 1959; Lubell & Kimball, 1960; Rice, 1967; Bowers, 1974; Parsons, 1989; Splichal & Sparks, 1994; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996; Adams, Brunner & Fitch-Hausser, 2008). Weaver et. al (2007) report that more than one in five respondents indicated a love for writing was the primary reason for pursuing a career in journalism. People are also drawn to journalism

because of activities like news gathering, researching, talking to and meeting new people and the chance to tell stories (Weaver et al., 2007).

The desire to be in a profession that has an important social or political role also was appealing (Bowers, 1974; Becker, Fruit, Caudill, 1987; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996; Weaver et al, 2007). According to Weaver et al. (2007) journalists said they were drawn to the field “because of the special role a journalist has in a democratic society. The ‘importance’ of journalism, the chance to serve the public, the opportunity to witness important historical events and the potential to effect social change were primary motivations for about a quarter of respondents. Almost 16 percent alluded to the central role of journalism in public life” (pp. 57-58). Others chose to pursue journalism because they viewed it as an exciting profession (Becker, Fruit, & Caudill, 1987; Weaver et al, 2007).

People have also been drawn to journalism through socialization to the field by early influential experiences. For example, these experiences may have occurred because of something that took place in a classroom or someone like a relative or friend may have influenced them by exposing them to journalism (Splichal & Sparks, 1994; Weaver et al., 2007).

Education and Training

When looking at education and training in relation to students pursuing journalism, it is necessary to look at both high and college experiences. Research consistently shows that experiences and exposure to journalism before entering the job market has lasting positive effects and is influential in helping students succeed in finding jobs (Feldman, 1995; Becker, Vlad, & Olin 2009).

Experience in journalism prior to entering college plays a significant role in students' decisions to pursue majors in journalism and mass communications and careers in the field once they finish college. Studies show that students who participated in high school journalism activities such as newspaper, yearbook, radio and television had higher GPAs, and scored higher on standardized tests like the ACT than students who did not participate in such activities (Dvorak, 1990; Dvorak, J., & Changhee, C. 2009; Becker et al., 2009). Grades by students in journalism and mass communications programs in college have generally improved over the years. The number of journalism students finishing college with an 'A' grade point average increased from 26.2 percent in 1989 to 48.4 percent in 2009, while the number of students who received a 'B' dropped significantly from 70.1 percent in 1989 to 47.3 percent in 2009 (Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communications Graduates, 2009).

Also, exposure in high school created awareness and interest in the field of journalism (Castaneda, 2001), leading students to pursue journalism as a major and a career. Students involved in journalism activities or classes in high school were 10 times as likely to major in journalism or mass communications while in college and later pursue a career in the field (Dvorak, 1990). And deciding early, in high school, to pursue journalism is associated with increased commitment later to journalism as a field (Lowrey & Becker, 2004). The 1997 American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) study reported that 25 percent of participants indicated they decided on a career while still in high school (Butler, 2006; Becker et al., 2009). Becker, Fruit & Caudill (1987) reported that 5.5 percent of students decided to

study journalism before high school but that a majority of students made the decision to major in journalism while in high school (33.1 percent) indicating that early experiences play an important role in deciding to pursue journalism. Since the 1990s, the percentage of students deciding to major in journalism before entering college has remained consistent. In 1990, 50.4 percent of journalism graduates chose to study journalism and the number has increased to 56.7 percent by 1995 and that number has remained stable with 55.4 percent of graduates in 2007 choosing to major in journalism before college. (Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communications Graduates; Becker et al., 2009). The majority of students who decided to major in journalism and mass communications prior to entering college were engaged in various journalism activities in high school. For example, 80 percent of 2007 graduates reported having worked for the student newspaper in high school, whereas 45.9 percent did not and 80.5 percent worked for the campus TV or radio station and 51.8 percent of respondents had not (Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates; Becker et al, 2009). According to Becker et al. (2009), high school experiences not only prepare students for college, but also have lasting effects that will help students succeed in the job market when they finish school. Among the 2007 bachelors degree recipients survey, the percentage of students employed within 6 to 8 months after graduation was higher among those who participated in journalism activities in high school than those who did not.

Research also indicates that college experiences and internships serve as predictors of success in the job market (Becker, Kosicki, Engleman & Viswanath,

1993; Feldman, 1995; Becker, Lauf & Lowrey, 1999; Becker et al., 2009).

Internships, as an activity, have consistently ranked higher than any other campus activity students are involved in during college, according to the Annual Surveys of Journalism and Mass Communications (Becker et al., 2009). For example, even when participation in the student newspaper was at an all-time high in 1986 (58.4 percent), participation in an internship was higher, with 67.9 percent of students engaging in an internship in college. More than 20 years later, the same holds true, with 79.3 percent of students involved in an internship and only 30 percent involved with the student newspaper in 2009. The newspaper was the most popular campus activity, after the internship. Internships play a vital role in student success in journalism. As Femmel (1978) points out, internships provide students with professional experience before graduation, allowing them to build a portfolio and make professional contacts.

Job Availability and Job Satisfaction

When graduates were asked why they took the jobs they did in the 2009 Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates, answers indicated that availability was the biggest factor. For example, in 2008 and 2009 there was a large increase in the percentage of people who took jobs based on availability rather than taking jobs because that was what they wanted to do. In 2007, 23.1 percent of respondents took jobs based on availability. That number increased to 33.7 percent in 2008 and 43.9 percent in 2009. Likewise, the numbers of those who took jobs because of what they wanted to do decreased. In 2009, only 51.2 percent of respondents took jobs because it was what they wanted to do. That

number decreased from 56.8 in 2008 and 60.9 in 2007. The last time there was a large increase in the percentage of people who took jobs based on availability occurred in 2001 when that number jumped to 33.9 percent from 18.2 percent. In 2001, the unemployment rate among journalism graduates jumped to 5.4 percent from 4.1 percent in 2000. In 2007, the unemployment rate among journalism graduates was 8.2 percent, rising to 14.3 percent in 2008 and then reaching an all-time high at 14.9 percent in 2009. These statistics indicate a weakened economy affect why journalism graduates take jobs (Becker et. al, 2009).

However, even though fewer people took jobs based on what they wanted to over this last year, the level of job satisfaction remained fairly stable from 2008 to 2009 with only a 1.2 percent decrease in job satisfaction among those with full-time jobs and 0.3 percent decrease among those with part-time jobs, indicating that graduates may simply be satisfied with having a job in the worst job market to date for those entering the field of journalism and mass communication (Becker et. al, 2009). Given that job satisfaction tends to remain stable in the weakened economy, it is necessary to look at what affects job satisfaction and the relationship of job satisfaction to commitment to journalism.

For more than 30 years, job satisfaction among journalists has continued to steadily decline. Research shows that the decline in job satisfaction is a result of changes in professional practice. Johnstone et al. (1976) found that between 20% and 25% of young journalists questioned their professional commitment because of the dissatisfaction they experienced regarding professional considerations, not economic opportunities. According to Johnstone et al. (1976), 48.8 percent of

journalists reported being very satisfied with their jobs. More than 10 years later, only 40 percent of young journalists reported being very satisfied with their jobs (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986). By the 1990s, job satisfaction among journalists dropped significantly. Only 27.3 percent reported being very satisfied with their work. In 2002, job satisfaction increased, according to Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes and Wilhoit (2007), who reported that 33.3 percent said they were very satisfied with their work.

In 1971, reported predictors of job satisfaction included the journalists' perception of how well their news organizations were doing their job of informing the public, and the importance of autonomy in the work environment. Job satisfaction is also strongly related to commitment to the field. 82.8 percent of journalists in the 1971 study expected to be working in news media in five years (Johnstone et al., 1976). Similar to the findings of Johnstone et al. (1976), 82.6 percent of journalists still expected to be working in the news media in five years (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986). In 1992, the decline in job satisfaction was attributed to an increase in more strict policies on journalists' autonomy. And the number of journalists who expected to remain in the field in five years dropped to 73.8 percent (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996). Like the previous research, predictors of job satisfaction in 2002 were linked to journalistic autonomy and news organizations' ability to effectively inform the public. Weaver et al. (2007) reported that 17.2 percent of journalists intended to leave the profession, citing pay, job security and an unfavorable work environment as reasons for wanting to leave. More recent research supports the previous studies finding that while organizational support

and social support are keys to job satisfaction, a harsh work environment contributes to dissatisfaction among working journalists (Reinardy, 2009). According to Reinardy (2009), industry issues and job satisfaction were most directly related to journalists' intentions to leave the profession.

Occupational Commitment

As the practice of journalism continues to change, it is necessary to understand what factors will affect students' commitment to the occupation over the long term. Commitment to journalism has declined over the last three decades and continues to do so (Becker, Vlad,, Coffey,& Hennink-Kaminski, 2003; Johnstone, Slawski & Bowman, 1976 Voakes, 1996; Lowery & Becker, 2004). Some of the most recent research exploring occupational commitment as it relates to journalism is Lowrey and Becker's (2004) study that looks at how high school and college activities influence commitment to journalistic work. The study emphasizes that a clear distinction exists between organizational and occupational commitment: Factors that influence occupational commitment differ from those influencing organizational commitment (Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000; McDuff and Meuller, 2000). Lowrey and Becker (2004) found that even though high school and college experiences are predictors of looking for work in journalism, those experiences do not directly determine occupational commitment to journalism. Rather, they have an indirect effect, as they increase likelihood of college journalism involvement and of making connections in journalism. The strongest direct predictors of occupational

commitment were factors related to satisfaction with one's work environment, including job satisfaction and pride in the organization (Lowrey and Becker, 2004).

To better understand the distinction of occupational commitment as it relates to journalism, a brief review of the literature regarding occupational commitment would be helpful. Over the years, literature has sometimes used the terms organizational commitment and occupational commitment interchangeably, though this has caused some confusion (Lee, Carswell & Allen, 2000). Early research defines occupational commitment in terms of career salience, the importance of work in one's life (Greenhaus, 1971, 1973; Morrow, 1983; Lee, Carswell & Allen, 2000). Commitment to one's career has been defined as one's attitude toward his or her profession or vocation, separating it from organizational commitment and job commitment (Morrow, 1983; Blau, G., 1985, 1988, 1989; McGinnis & Morrow 1991). Career commitment involves dedication to aspirations in work and career, whereas job involvement refers to the extent to which work activities factor into life plans and the desire to work, even when no financial need exists. There has been some redundant usage among the terms "career salience," "career commitment" and "job involvement" (Morrow, 1983; Blau, G., 1985, 1988).

Research indicates both professionals and nonprofessionals experience occupational commitment, commitment to a specific line of work (G. Blau, 1998, 1989; Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993; Lee, Carswell & Allen, 2000). Occupational commitment, when defined as a psychological link between the occupation and the individual can be said to be based on an *affective* reaction (Lee, Carswell & Allen, 2000, Blau, G., 2003). A person who possesses positive feelings towards his or her

occupation, identifies more strongly with the occupation itself, leading to a higher occupational commitment. The feelings one experiences toward the occupation provides insight as to whether or not the person chooses to remain in the profession (Blau, G., 1985, 2003; Meyer & Allen, 1993); Lee, Carswell & Allen, 2000).

However, occupational commitment has also been discussed by researchers in terms of *normative* and *continuance* commitment, in addition to *affective* commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993; Morrow, 1993; Irving et al., 1997; Lee, Carswell & Allen, 2000; Blau, G., 2003). Meyer and Allen (1991) first proposed this three-component model as a combination of the attitude and behavioral approaches to occupational commitment. These three types of commitment actually measure motivations for commitment to a field rather than commitment itself. The model was first used to study organizational commitment, but it was later applied to occupational commitment (Irving, Coleman & Cooper, 1997; Lee, Carswell & Allen, 2000; Blau, G., 2003).

The first component of this three-dimensional structure, affective commitment, deals with the emotional attachment and personal involvement one has in an occupation (Kanter, 1968, Buchanan, 1974; Myer & Allen, 1991; Lee, Carswell & Allen, 2000). Feelings regarding personal commitment lead to one's decision to remain in their particular occupational role (Allen & Meyer, 1990, Meyer & Allen, 1991; Lee, Carswell & Allen, 2000). Affective commitment is distinct from both normative and continuance commitment (Meyer et al, 1993; Irving, Coleman & Cooper, 1997; Lee Carswell, & Allen, 2000). Normative commitment, also referred to as obligation, determines whether or not individuals feel they *should* remain in an

occupation because they feel obliged to do so. They feel a pressure to act in such a way that reflects a need to meet the normative goals and interests of the organization or occupation (Weiner, 1982; Myer & Allen, 1991; Irving, Coleman & Cooper, 1997). Myer & Allen (1991) state that this obligation is a result of socialization experiences, whether that is because of loyalty to role models (i.e. colleagues/employers) or based on reciprocity from rewards and punishment (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Continuance commitment has to do with the perceived costs of leaving an occupation (Becker, 1960; Kanter, 1968; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Irving, Coleman & Cooper, 1997; Lee, Carswell & Allen, 2000; Blau, 2003; Lowrey & Becker, 2004). One of the earliest theories developed regarding continuance commitment defines it in such a way that implies personal investments made in taking a course of action, and then the relative cost of leaving the occupation or staying with it, given these investments made (Becker, 1960). This conceptual definition has trickled down through ongoing research (Meyer & Allen, 1991, Lee, Carswell & Allen, 2000; Lowrey & Becker, 2004).

Blau (2003) re-conceptualized occupational commitment by introducing a four-dimensional structure: affective, normative, accumulated costs and limited alternatives. Occupational entrenchment, or establishment within the occupation, is proposed as a construct that overlaps continuance commitment, from the framework provided by Becker (1960). It emphasizes the perceived costs of leaving the occupation as well as the availability of occupational alternatives (Carson, Carson & Bedeian, 1995; Carson et. al, 1996; G. Blau, 2003). Occupational

entrenchment, similar to the concept of continuance commitment, consists of three occupational constructs including occupational investment, emotional costs and limited alternatives to the occupation. Occupational investment measures the accumulated costs that would be lost if one left the profession. Emotional costs examine the emotional tag that comes with pursuing a new occupation, while limitedness of occupational alternatives is defined as the lack of perceived options in pursuing a new occupation (Carson et al., 1995; G. Blau, 2003). Maintaining occupational investments while trying to reduce emotional costs prevents an individual from pursuing applicable occupational alternatives (Teger, 1980; Blau, 2003). All of these constructs represent costs associated with continuance commitment, resulting in an overlap between the concepts. Blau (2003) proposes that emotional costs and occupational investments be combined and represented as accumulated costs as previously suggested in research by Blau (2001). In this study, explanation for occupational commitment will be explored in terms of the three motivations of affective, normative and continuance commitment– with continuance relating to costs and investments made over time – as done in previous studies related to jobs in journalism (Lowrey & Becker, 2004)

Research Questions

Previous research shows an impact of economic conditions on the perceptions of those entering the fields of journalism and mass communication, including the degree to which they pursue journalism jobs. Research also shows that one's working conditions has an impact on job satisfaction and commitment. Given the apparent challenges journalism faces in trying to offer those who enter the field secure and appealing working environments, it seems reasonable to test the importance of perceptions of the health of the field on the commitment to the field. How important is perception of the health of the journalism field to the decisions of students to pursue journalism and to feel committed to it?

The following research questions are posed:

RQ 1: How important are students' perceptions of the state of the journalism profession and journalism industry to their decisions to pursue journalism, relative to other factors?

RQ 2: How important are students' perceptions of the state of the journalism profession and journalism industry to their commitment to journalism as an occupational field, relative to other factors?

Previous research has also shown the importance of the three motivations of affective, normative and continuance commitment for explaining the level of occupational commitment:

RQ 3: To what degree are the three types of motivation for occupational commitment – affective, normative and continuance – evident among the students? How do they compare in degree of importance?

RQ4: How important are these three types of motivation to students' decisions to pursue a journalism job? And to their commitment to journalism as an occupational field?

It is likely that other factors will affect the decision to pursue journalism as well as commitment to the field, including high school and college involvement in journalism activities, internships, perception of the news media and demographic factors.

RQ 5: What other factors influence students' decisions to pursue journalism?

RQ 6: What other factors influence students' commitment to journalism as a field?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Multiple factors influence a student's decision to pursue journalism as a major course of study and as a career (Bowers, T., 1974; Singer, J. & Craig, D. 1996; Gaziano, C. & McGrath, K. 1986). Extensive research has been conducted that examines the educational and occupational training students receive in the classroom, through internships and their involvement in campus media, as well as the effects of these experiences (Yarnall, L., Johnson, J.T., Rine, L. & Ranney, M.A. 2008; Feldman, B. 1995; Lowrey, W. & Becker, L. 2004). Studies show that student experiences and perceptions about journalism vary due to a wide range of educational and training programs that exist in universities throughout the country. (Bowers, 1974; Becker, L. B., Fruit, J. W. & Caudill, S. L. 1987; Weaver, D., Beam, R., Brownlee, B., Voakes, P. & Wilhoit, G. 2007). Occupational commitment is also related to job factors such as the nature of the work, the work environment, professional autonomy, and tangible benefits such as salary, benefits, and opportunities for advancement (Blau, G. 2003; Lee, K., Carswell, J., Allen, N. 2000; Meyer, J.P., Allen, N.J., Smith, C.A. 1993), though these factors are not assessed here.

Examining the mechanism that influences student decisions to pursue journalism, as a job and as a career, should give journalism educators and journalism employers insightful information to assist them in making decisions when designing courses for students and training programs for job entrants.

The study was based on a survey of college students currently enrolled in media courses at the University of Alabama's College of Communication and Information Sciences and Samford University at all levels – freshman, sophomore, junior, senior and graduate students – during spring 2011. The study focused on reasons for deciding to pursue jobs and careers in journalism, so a college-student sample is appropriate. Participation was voluntary. Diversity by year in school was sought, though the sample contains significantly more underclassmen than upperclassmen. The study targets journalism students, but underclass advertising and PR students were also included, as they take the large JN 150 and JN 311 introductory courses at the University of Alabama.

Students were sent e-mails through their instructors requesting they take part in the study. IRB approval was acquired, and the e-mail detailed students' rights as research participants. Students were offered a small amount of extra credit for participating, depending on the wish of the class instructor.

The e-mail linked to an online instrument designed to measure decisions to pursue journalism jobs after graduation, as well as level of commitment to journalism (and secondarily, other media fields). In this survey journalism refers to informational media work produced for various media outlets like newspapers, magazines and trade publications, online and broadcast (TV, film). Other media related fields refers to public relations and advertising. The instrument also measured factors that may influence students' decisions to pursue journalism. For example it measured their feelings about the economic health of journalism as a profession and as an industry. Other possible predictors that the survey measured

included: “affective” motivations for commitment, “continuance” motivations for commitment and “normative” motivations for commitment; feelings about the news media in general; typical exposure to news media; past involvement in high school and college journalism activities and internships, and salary expectations.

Questions related to demographics were also included. Survey questions were adapted from previous research regarding journalism education and occupational commitment (Weaver, D., Beam, R., Brownlee, B., Voakes, P. & Wilhoit, G. 2007; Becker, L. B., Vlad, T., Vogel, M., Wilcox, D., & Hanisak, S. (2008); Meyer, J.P., Allen, N.J., Smith, C.A. 1993). The online survey was created in Survey Monkey.

Data were collected over a three-week time period, in the middle of the spring 2011 semester. The first survey instrument was composed of a total of 36 survey items (See Appendix 1). A total of 454 students responded to this survey. It was discovered that three of the questions measuring perception of media were left out of this survey, and so a follow-up survey was sent that contained only these three questions (Appendix 2). A total of 208 responses were collected from this survey, and results were added to the original survey after matching student ID numbers. Relationships between variables in the hypotheses and research questions were measured using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Decision to pursue journalism and commitment to journalism:

The first main dependent (criterion) variable “decision to pursue journalism” is defined as choosing to actually pursue a journalism job upon graduation. It is operationally defined through survey questions that ask directly about intent to pursue a job upon graduation ($M=2.79$, $s.d.=1.23$), and questions that ask more

specifically about intent to pursue certain types of jobs (All questions on a 5-point scale; See survey questionnaire in Appendix A). These measures were summed ($\alpha=.80$). The conceptual definition for the second main dependent (criterion) variable, “commitment to journalism,” is the intent to stay in the field of journalism as a career. Commitment is operationally defined by asking whether or not they hoped to be working in a journalism-related field in 5 to 10 years (Yes = 17.1%) (Lowrey & Becker, 2004), and by asking how “committed” the individual is to a career in journalism ($M=1.62$, $s.d.=1.31$, $range = 1-5$). These measures were turned into z-scores and then summed ($\alpha = .78$)

The means for these measures were higher for only those 120 students with a journalism emphasis (Pursue a journalism job: $M=4.0$, $s.d.=1.0$; Working in journalism field in 5-10 years: 53.3%; Committed: $M=2.90$, $s.d.=1.0$)

As talked about in the literature review, the concept of commitment can be thought of as having three different motivations: one is “liking” the field of journalism or feeling affect for journalism as a field (“affective commitment”); another is a pull toward a journalism career because of investments of time and effort already made in pursuing journalism (continuance commitment); a third is a motivation from feeling journalism is a socially worthy goal (normative commitment). Questions used for these three types of motivation for commitment to the field were adapted from questions that have been used to assess occupational commitment in previous research (Blau, G., 2003; Lee, K., Carswell, J., Allen, N., 2000; Gaziano, C. & McGrath, K., 1986; Lowrey & Becker, 2004; Meyer, J.P., Allen, N.J., Smith, C.A., 1993;). Using 5-point scale items, motivations for continuance

commitment were measured by asking participants survey items about time and energy invested and degree of difficulty in changing course ($M=4.61, s.d.=2.64$). Affective motivations for commitment to journalism were measured through survey items that assessed attitudes toward the profession, to determine the level of commitment based on feelings about journalism. Scale items ranging from 1-5 included: "I am enthusiastic about journalism as a profession" and "I regret my decision to pursue journalism" ($M=10.76, s.d.=2.64$). Normative commitment was also used measured using the 1-5 range scale items. Normative commitment measures the level of commitment towards the profession based on a sense of social obligation. An example of a statement used to measure normative commitment says, "I would feel guilty if I left journalism," or "I feel a responsibility to continue in journalism because of journalism's service to the public" ($M=8.13, s.d.=2.63$).

Other predictors: Perceptions of Journalism and the state of the Industry:

Participants were asked about previous journalism experiences in high school and college. These experiences were scored as 1=Yes, 0=No and summed ($M=1.64, s.d.= 1.60$). For example, participants were asked about high school, college and work experience in the field, they were asked to specify which specialization of communications they chose to pursue as well as which extra-curricular activities they were involved in high school and college; and they were asked to specify if they took journalism courses in high school, and were involved with student media in high school. Also, students were asked to indicate whether or not they had work experience in the field, including internships and part-time or full time work. These questions come from previous studies of journalism education and commitment

(Weaver, D., Beam, R., Brownlee, B., Voakes, P. & Wilhoit, G. 2007; Becker, L. B., Vlad, T., Vogel, M., Wilcox, D., & Hanisak, S. 2008), Becker et. al, 2009).

Participants also answered questions that rate their attitudes about the current state of the media. Perceptions were measured as predictors or influences on decision to pursue journalism and commitment to journalism. Three questions relating to their perceptions about the health of the industry were assessed, each on a scale of 1-5 ($M=10.74$, $s.d.=2.01$). Also, perception will be assessed based on questions relating to how many hours per day on average participants pay attention to media ($M=9.38$, $s.d.=5.77$), as well as seven questions (scale of 1-5) related to their overall impressions of news media -- perceptions of credibility of journalists, and thoughts about the role of journalism in society ($M=21.20$, $s.d.=3.12$). These questions were adapted from the Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication graduates (Becker et al., (2009).

Demographics:

Participants answered general questions with regard to demographics. Participants were asked to provide information on a 3-point scale about socioeconomic level ($M=2.99$, $s.d.=.82$), political leanings on a 5-point scale ($M=2.73$, $s.d.=0.97$), gender, race and year in school. Many of these questions were adapted from the 2002 Journalists Survey Questionnaire (Weaver et. al, 2007) and the Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates (Becker et. al, 2009). All of the demographic factors are operating as independent variables.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In order to answer the research questions in this study, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used. Also, bivariate correlation analyses and means analyses were conducted. A hierarchical regression analysis, a form of linear regression, is a multi-level analysis that allows the variance of outcome variables to be analyzed at more than one level instead of just a single level. Usually independent variables are entered in different blocks. They are tested to see how much they explain the variance in the dependent variable as each one is added. Regression lets the researcher control other variables when testing the effect for each variable on the dependent variable. The bivariate correlation simply evaluates the relationship between two quantitative variables without distinction between the independent and dependent variables, and it does not control for other variables.

The first and second research questions addressed in this study examine whether or not students' perceptions of the state of the journalism profession and the health of the industry play a role in their decisions to pursue journalism and their commitment to the field of journalism. For each dependent variable, the decision to pursue journalism, and commitment to the field, two regression analyses were conducted. One regression analysis looks at only those particular cases of students who emphasize studying journalism. These include all students who listed journalism as either a major, a possible major, or a minor. There were 57 such students. The other looks at all cases combined – students who indicated an

emphasis in journalism as well as those who indicated an emphasis in other fields (most typically, public relations, advertising, telecommunications). There were 208 such cases. Results indicated that perceptions about the journalism profession and the health of the industry were not predictive of students' decisions to pursue journalism ($\beta=.03$). Perceptions about the health of the industry and the profession were also not predictors of commitment to the field either ($\beta =.09$). Bivariate correlations were also small and not significant, with the largest being between "I think the news industry will have jobs" and "Decision to Pursue" ($r=.16$). These results may suggest that students who decide to pursue journalism are well aware of the health of the industry before they pursue this career path. The findings also suggest that other factors exist that lead students to pursue careers in journalism. These other factors are addressed in research questions 5 and 6.

In addressing the third research question -- to what degree are the three types of motivation for occupational commitment, affective, normative and continuance, evident among the students -- descriptive statistics were used to make comparisons in terms of means. Standard deviations were also calculated. Affective motivation is "liking" the field of journalism or feeling affect for journalism as a field; continuance motivation is a pull toward a journalism career because of investments of time and effort already made in pursuing journalism; normative motivation is a motivation from feeling journalism is a socially worthy goal. Each type of motivation was calculated using a sum of three measures. Each measure allowed for scores from 1 to 5. This analysis was run in two ways. First, all cases were analyzed, including students who both emphasized and did not emphasize journalism as a

career. Continuance commitment appeared to be least evident of these three types of motivation that influence students' commitment, with a mean of 4.61 (*s.d.* = 2.64). Normative commitment was higher, with a mean of 8.13 (*s.d.* = 2.63). Finally, among these three types of commitment motivation the motivation of affective commitment seems to play the strongest role in students' commitment to the field of journalism with a mean of 10.76 (*s.d.*=2.64) (See Table 1).

Table 1: Means for different types of motivation for occupational commitment

Commitment	All students in sample			Students with journalism emphasis		
	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.
Continuance	431	4.61	2.64	120	6.21	2.13
Normative	367	8.13	2.63	120	8.97	2.60
Affective	353	10.76	2.64	120	12.60	2.64

Next, means were computed for only students with a journalism emphasis (listing journalism as a major or minor). The mean for continuance commitment was 6.21 (*s.d.* = 2.13), the mean for normative commitment was 8.97 (*s.d.* = 2.60) and the mean for affective commitment was 12.60 (*s.d.* = 2.64). Students with a journalism emphasis were more motivated by continuance commitment, normative

commitment and affective commitment than were the sample of all students, though motivation by normative commitment was only a little higher. These numbers indicate that comparatively, time and effort students already have invested in pursuing journalism, and normative pressures like the perceived need to help society as a whole through journalism, are not as influential in motivating them to pursue journalism as their own personal feelings about journalism.

To answer the fourth research question about how important these three types of motivation (affective, normative, continuance) are to students' decisions to pursue journalism and their commitment to the field, bivariate correlations were conducted. The bivariate correlation analyses resulted in some significant correlations with decision to pursue journalism and commitment to the field (See Table 2). Motivation from affective commitment not only correlated strongly and significantly with the decision to pursue journalism ($r = .58, p < .01$) but also correlated strongly with commitment to journalism ($r = .66, p < .01$). This was similar to results for only students with a journalism emphasis. For these students, the correlation with decision to pursue journalism was .40, while the correlation with commitment to journalism was .61. These numbers suggest affective motivation relates not solely to commitment to the field but also indicates a relationship to students' decisions to pursue journalism. Likewise normative motivation is significantly related to students' decision to pursue journalism ($r = .41, p < .01$) as well as commitment to the field ($r = .40, p < .01$). Again, this is similar to findings for only students with a journalism emphasis. Normative motivation is related to decision to pursue ($r = .32, p < .01$) and to commitment to journalism ($r = .31, p < .01$).

Continuance motivation also shares a strong relationship with the decision to pursue journalism ($r=.45, p < .01$) and commitment to the field ($r= .41, p < .01$). For only journalism students, motivation by continuance commitment was moderately correlated with decision to pursue ($r=.25, p < .01$), but had a weak and non-significant correlation with commitment ($r=.12, p > .05$).

Table 2: Bivariate correlations for types of motivation, decision to pursue journalism, and commitment to journalism.

		Decision to Pursue Journalism, all students (N=426)	Commitment to Journalism, all students (N=426)	Decision to Pursue Journalism, only JN students (N=120)	Commitment to Journalism, only JN students (N=120)
Normative Commitment Motivation	r-Value	.41**	.40**	.32**	.31**
Continuance Commitment Motivation	r-Value	.45**	.41**	.25**	.12
Affective Commitment Motivation	r-Value	.58**	.66**	.40**	.61**

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

It appears that just liking the doing of journalism – affective motivation – is the most powerful type of motivation among these three. In contrast, continuance motivation does not seem to explain journalism students’ level of commitment to the field. They do not feel that the investment that they have made to this point is the reason they are committed to the field. Normative motivation or doing journalism because it is

seen as the right thing to do for society is a fairly strong motivator, but not nearly as strong as affective motivation.

When looking at research questions 5 and 6 – what other factors influence students’ decisions to pursue journalism and their commitment to the field of journalism – hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted. As with research questions 1 and 2, four regression analyses were used, two to assess predictors of the decision to pursue journalism in relation to other factors, and two to assess predictors of commitment to the field in relation to other factors. For each of the dependent variables, a regression analysis was conducted that included only students with an emphasis in journalism, and a regression analysis was conducted that included students from all areas of emphasis to see how factors affecting students’ decisions to pursue and commitment to field compared among journalism students and students from other areas of study. For these analyses, the independent variable “perception of the health of the industry” was deleted from the model because it was not significant and correlations were very small in the earlier analysis. Also there were only half the number of cases for this variable, meaning only half the total cases would be included in this analysis.

The R-Square for the model regressing the decision to pursue journalism on factors for students who emphasize study in journalism is .40. The R-Square for the model regressing the decision to pursue journalism on factors for all students is .41. According to these numbers, many factors that would predict decision to pursue journalism are accounted for in this study. When doing a regression on the decision to pursue journalism on predictors for students who have a journalism emphasis, a

strong predictor of decision to pursue was “perception of the media” ($\beta=.25$, $p<.05$). This was not an important predictor for all students. Apparently for journalism students, feeling positive about the job the news media does now is important to make them feel comfortable about the possibility of working in that field.

Otherwise for students with a journalism emphasis, liking certain journalism skills was most important in explaining decision to pursue journalism, in particular editing ($\beta=.31$) and online work ($\beta=.25$).

Socioeconomic level ($\beta=-.15$, $p<.01$), high school and college activities ($\beta=.35$, $p<.01$), and salary expectations ($\beta=-.13$, $p<.01$) were significant predictors for the analysis with all students (See Table 3). With regards to skills, reporting and interviewing was a moderate predictor among students as a whole ($\beta=.19$, $p<.01$), and so was editing ($\beta=.11$, $p<.05$) and producing online media ($\beta=.19$, $p<.01$).

The R Square for the model regressing commitment to the field of journalism on factors for students who emphasize study in journalism was .30. The R Square for the model regressing commitment to the field of journalism on factors for all students was .38. Again, these moderately high numbers indicate that many of the factors predicting commitment to the field of journalism were accounted for. Across all students, the strongest predictor of commitment to journalism was involvement in high school and college media activities ($\beta=.33$, $p<.01$). Socioeconomic status ($\beta=-.15$, $p<.01$), salary expectations ($\beta=-.16$, $p<.01$) were also significant, but these correlated in the opposite direction, so that those with lower socio-economic

status and lower expectations of salary said they were more committed to journalism as a field. Having a more positive perception of the news media was also a significant factor, but it was fairly weak. Enjoyment of journalism skills was also correlated: Writing skills was a strong predictor for commitment to journalism ($\beta=.18, p<.01$) though not in the decision to pursue, and liking online work, and reporting were also correlated. Liking visual design skills was negatively correlated ($\beta=-.14, p<.05$), and this may be because many of the students were advertising and public relations students, and design skills are important in their fields. For just journalism students, having a positive perception of the media was a very important factor for commitment to the field ($\beta=.32, p<.01$), and expected salary was a big negative ($\beta=-.29, p<.01$). Again, lower socioeconomic level was a predictor, as was liking reporting and interviewing.

Table 3: Hierarchical regression analysis: Decision to Pursue Journalism and Commitment to Journalism as a Field regressed on blocks of predictors

	Decision to Pursue JN (N=431)		Commitment to JN (N=120)	
	Students w/JN Emphasis	All Students	Students w/ JN Emphasis	All Students
BLOCK 1: DEMOGRAPHICS				
Race (Caucasian or not)	.05	.02	-.10	-.02
Gender	-.05	.02	.01	.01
Socioeconomic Bracket	-.17	-.15**	-.21*	-.15**
Political Leaning (higher score indicates more liberal)	-.03	-.03	-.06	-.02
High School & College Activities (summed)	.16	.35**	.10	.33**
<i>R Square Change</i>	.15	.26	.10	.23
BLOCK 2: ENJOY SKILLS (5-point scales, SD to SA)				
I enjoy writing	-.03	.08	.04	.18**
I enjoy editing	.24*	.11*	-.04	.05
I enjoy reporting and interviewing	.11	.19**	.27*	.12*
I enjoy photography and/or videography	.04	.03	.06	.08
I enjoy producing online/web media	.31**	.19**	.01	.14*
I enjoy doing visual design	-.16	-.07	.04	-.14*
<i>R Square Change</i>	.19	.13	.07	.12
<i>R Square</i>	.34	.39	.18	.35
<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	.25	.37	.07	.32
BLOCK 3: PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MEDIA AND MEDIA INDUSTRY				
Perception of media (5-pt scale)	.25*	.03	.32**	.10*

Hours spent using media per day	.11	.08	.07	-.01
<i>R Square Change</i>	.06	.01	.06	.01
<i>R Square</i>	.40	.39	.23	.36
<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	.30	.37	.11	.33
BLOCK 4: EXPECTATIONS				
Salary Expectations (higher score = higher expectations)	-.08	-.13**	-.29**	-.16**
<i>R Square Change</i>	.01	.01	.06	.02
<i>R Square</i>	.40	.41	.30	.38
<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	.30	.38	.18	.35

Standardized regression coefficients

**p<.01 *p<.05

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of research questions 1 and 2 regarding perceptions about the health of the industry and the media profession, neither of these factors, the health of the industry, nor perceptions about the media profession supported student decisions to pursue journalism or their commitment to the field. Initially, the current state of the media industry in relation to the unstable economy was what led to the premise of this research, but these findings suggest that the state of the media industry and the profession do not affect students' decisions to pursue journalism as much as first thought. A few conclusions can be drawn from the primary findings of this research. Students are most likely aware of the health of the industry and the state of the profession before they even consider choosing to pursue a career in the field, and so they choose journalism with "eyes wide open." This might suggest exposure to media influences students' decisions to pursue journalism and their commitment to the field. Therefore, exposing students' to journalism through hands-on classroom curriculum and extra-curricular activities becomes necessary in increasing their commitment to the field.

For journalism students, perception of the media was a strong predictor in both the decision to pursue journalism and their commitment to the field, meaning feeling positive about the job the news media does is important in making journalism students feel comfortable about the possibility of working in the industry. For journalism educators this means developing curriculum that increases

students' exposure to media in positive ways, so as to establish trust between students and the media. Industry professionals also share in this responsibility in establishing trust between students and the media if they hope to draw students to work for their organizations. This trust can be established in a number of ways. Journalism educators can develop curriculum that brings positive examples of media into the classroom. For example, when teaching students about producing journalism, teachers could show examples of news broadcasts for students to analyze, asking them to identify what makes the broadcast credible and asking them what they like about the broadcast. Another way to establish trust among students and media professionals is for educators to bring media professionals into the classroom to talk with students about current trends in the industry and answer students' questions with regards to working in the fields. This also allows media professionals to be involved in the process of establishing trust among students. If students receive direct exposure to media professionals and have their questions answered by those actually working in the field, they may be more likely to trust the media and feel more comfortable about working in the industry. Educators could also design curriculum that takes students out of the classroom, to media organizations. This gives students exposure to working in the media environment and allows them the opportunity to talk with media professionals. This also allows media professionals the opportunity to show students the production process in an effort to draw students to their organizations as prospective employees.

Similar to perception of the media being a strong predictor among journalism students, exposure through involvement in journalism activities in high

school and college was a strong predictor among all students both in the decision to pursue journalism and commitment to the field. In an effort to motivate students to get involved with campus media, educators could create curriculum with assignments that include producing work for student media. For example, have students submit work published in student media as one of their grades for the course, the work varying depending on the course. For media professionals, this means taking an interest in student-produced work in order to understand what skills future employees will bring to their organizations. To do this, leaders of professional media organizations might take an interest in serving on student media advisory boards. This allows students and media professionals to work together in a collaborative way.

In looking at how different types of motivation influenced students' decisions to pursue journalism and their commitment to the field, findings indicated that among all respondents, affective motivation correlated most strongly, among the three motivation types, with both dependent variables. This suggests students pursue journalism because it is something they enjoy. Related to this affective motivation are the journalism skills students liked. The study revealed that editing, reporting and interviewing, and producing online work were favorite skills among all students. If affective motivation is what drives students to pursue journalism, educators should create a learning environment that allows students to work in the areas of journalism that interest them most. For example, educators could create a practicum course in the curriculum in which the class collaboratively creates a publication, and perhaps a corresponding website and broadcast. Students would

take on assignments based on skill interest and talent. Those who enjoy producing online work would be responsible for creating the website while those who enjoy editing and reporting would engage in producing the print publication. Creating courses that allow students to explore interests would be helpful for university administrators and educators in promoting their programs and recruiting students. Students interested in pursuing journalism would be more interested in programs that give them the freedom to explore their interests and talents. When taking these findings into consideration, media professionals should think about creating positions (e.g., practicums, internships) within their organizations that would allow future employees such as journalism students to work in areas of interest.

Findings of this study also revealed that socioeconomic status and salary expectations were strong predictors among all students in both their decisions to pursue journalism and their commitment to the field. However, these predictors correlated negatively with decisions to pursue as well as commitment. Students more interested in pursuing journalism and more committed to journalism had lower salary expectations. This again indicates students are pursuing journalism because it is something they like rather than for the salary, indicating a stronger personal commitment to the field and its crafts. As mentioned above, based on these findings, both educators and media professionals should create opportunities that allow students to explore their interests related to journalism. This gives educators an increased chance of recruiting students and industry professionals a chance to recruit prospective employees truly interested in pursuing journalism.

The other strong predictor, socioeconomic status, also correlated negatively with both dependent variables. Students falling in lower socioeconomic status brackets indicated a stronger intent to pursue journalism and a higher level of commitment to the field. For both educators and media professionals, this means targeting recruiting efforts at lower income schools. In order to recruit students from lower income schools, university administrators and media organizations need to provide funding for these students to participate in journalism related activities to promote interest as well as academic funding like scholarships to provide these students with educational opportunities that might not otherwise be available to them.

Limitations

One limitation in this study was that only students from Alabama and to a lesser extent, from Samford, were surveyed. So study results cannot be generalized beyond the sample. Also, the survey was not a random sample, and so error from sampling cannot be calculated. Another limitation is the relatively low level of responses received in the follow-up survey, compared to the first survey. Only 208 responses were received, approximately half of the number of responses received in the initial survey. If these questions had been addressed in the initial survey, it may be that a more accurate view of students' perceptions about the health of the industry would have been obtained, possibly changing the outcome that of a primary research question; however, correlations were so low, it is doubtful they would have changed enough to become notable predictors. Also, the number of responses provided by upperclassmen was much lower than the number of

responses given by underclassmen. If a higher number of upperclassmen responses had been obtained, it is possible there might have been more information revealed about the relationship between continuance motivation and commitment to the field of journalism, given that upperclassmen are closer to being finished with school and as a result have invested even more time in journalism. Similarly, respondents working in the field would likely have differed on the degree to which they expressed motivation by continuance commitment. And so the results are limited by the student-only sample.

In sum, results show that students pursue and feel committed to journalism because they are comfortable with and simply enjoy doing journalism: They enjoy particular skills (with a rising number indicating they like online skills), they have had past involvement in journalism activities and with journalism skills, and they say they feel comfortable with and trust the news media as a field. Journalism-oriented students seem to be already aware of low salary, and they say this and the state of the industry are not having a big impact on their decision to pursue journalism – this is the case even though those more likely to pursue journalism tended to rank themselves lower in terms of socio-economic level. Low importance of continuance commitment seems to mean students feel they have their options open, despite past involvement in journalism – students are flowing toward the field because they want to, and not so much because they feel they have to or even because they feel they should. In all, results warrant some measure of optimism for the field's future, with many still pulled toward the craft and profession despite present turbulence and uncertainty in the industry.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

1. You are being asked to be in a research study called “Student Decisions to Pursue a Media Career.” The study is being conducted by Emily Vernon, a Master’s student in the College of Communication and Information Sciences at the University of Alabama.

I am studying college students’ decisions to pursue a career in journalism. I am interested in helping explain these decisions because I think this explanation would be helpful to schools of journalism as they plan their curricula as well as to the news industry as they consider their own training programs.

You are asked to participate in this study because you are a college student. I need your permission before you can participate in the study.

The study involves taking an online survey on the computer and may be taken at any location with Internet access and a Web browser. The online survey should take approximately 10-15 MIN. to complete. It will be administered only once.

- Participation in this research project is VOLUNTARY. By clicking 'yes' below, you are agreeing to take the survey.
- If at any time you wish to stop filling out the survey, you may. No one will have to complete the survey.
- Your identity will be kept confidential. Please be honest and candid in your responses. You do not have to answer any questions or provide any information you do not want to.

Your name will not appear on any study document; however, the online survey will include a final page in which you can provide your student identification number and professor’s name. In this instance, only you and your professor will know you participated in the study. Your professor will not know how you answered the questions. We want to ensure your confidentiality and privacy, so we will separate your student identification number from your responses, so your identity cannot be connected to your responses. Your name will not appear on any study document. All data will be reported in terms of aggregates and groups. No one will be able to tell you participated in this study except your professor if you are completing the survey for research credit and provide your student ID number.

- There is no compensation for you for participation in this study. Participating in this study will not cost you anything except time. If you are taking a journalism course, your professor may allow you receive research credit for your participation in the survey. Please remember you do not have to take part in this study. You can also start the study and decide to stop at any time. Your responses will give us greater understanding of college students’ decisions to pursue a journalism career.

- Risks to you are minimal but existent. The survey includes questions related to perception of the current state of the media industry may create negative feelings about the field of journalism in general. While it is an unlikely effect, it is possible. You may also be uncomfortable answering questions about socioeconomic factors. Please remember you can stop filling out the survey at any time.

- For all of the questions in the survey, there are no right or wrong answers. The questions simply allow you to provide your personal views and opinions.

If you have any questions at any time, please ask. If you have questions at a later time, you may contact Emily Vernon at (205) 613-3007 or at ejvernon@crimson.ua.edu or Dr. Wilson Lowrey at (205) 348-8608 or wlowrey@bama.ua.edu The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and the study is being carried out as planned. You may also contact the Human Subjects representative for the University at (205) 348-5152 if you have any other questions.

By clicking "Yes" below, you agree to participate in this survey.

-Yes

-No

2. Which of the following best fits what you think you will do after you graduate?

-Work a full-time job

-Work a part-time job

-Attend graduate school

-Don't know/Undecided

-Other (Please Specify):

3. How likely are you to pursue a journalism job after graduating?

-I definitely will not

-I probably will not

-I might

- I probably will
- I definitely will

4. How likely are you to pursue a journalism CAREER after graduating?

- I definitely will not
- I probably will not
- I might
- I probably will
- I definitely will

5. Which of the following have you either searched or interviewed for?

- Full-time job related to journalism
- Part-time job related to journalism
- Internship related to journalism
- None

**6. How likely are you to pursue a job in the following areas upon graduating?
(You may choose more than one area.)**

	I definitely will not	I probably will not	I might	I probably will	I definitely will
Magazines/ Trade Publications					
Newspapers					
Digital, Online Media					
Broadcast Journalism (TV, Film)					

Teaching Journalism					
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7. Where do you hope to be working in 5 to 10 years?

- In a journalism-related field
- In another media-related field
- Doing something else entirely
- Don't know

8. How committed are you to the field of journalism?

- Not at all committed
- Slightly committed
- Somewhat committed
- Mostly committed
- Completely committed

9. Assuming you want to pursue journalism, how long do you think you might work in the journalism field? (Estimate in number of years.)

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the statements by selecting the choice that best fits your opinion. You may click N/A (Not Applicable.)

10. Decision to Pursue Journalism

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I regret my decision to pursue JN (as a profession or as a						

degree)						
I am/would be proud to be in the journalism profession						
I am enthusiastic about the journalism profession						

11. Planned Career Path

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I have put too much time and energy into the pursuit of journalism to change my career path now						
There are no pressures to keep me from changing my career path in journalism						
Changing my career path in journalism now would require personal sacrifice						

12. Obligation to Journalism

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I do not feel any obligation to						

maintain my career path in journalism						
I feel a responsibility to continue in journalism because of journalism's service to the public						
I would feel guilty if I left journalism						

Below is a list of statements related to enjoyment of various media skills. Please indicate how much you enjoy these skills.

13. Skills

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I enjoy writing.					
I enjoy editing.					
I enjoy reporting & interviewing.					
I enjoy publishing/producing work I know others will see.					
I enjoy photography and/or videography.					
I enjoy producing online/web media.					
I enjoy doing visual design.					

The following questions ask about your experiences in college and high school.

14. What year are you in college? (Estimate if you're unsure.)

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate student

15. What is your college major?

- Journalism
- Public Relations
- Advertising
- Telecommunications & Film
- Communication Studies
- Undecided
- Other (Please specify):

16. What is your college minor? (please fill in). If you don't know, type "Unsure" or "Undecided."

17. I have participated in extra-curricular activities related to journalism in COLLEGE.

- Yes
- No (If no, SKIP to Question 19.)

18. If yes, please specify which extracurricular activities in COLLEGE.

- School newspaper

- Yearbook
- Literary magazine
- School broadcast production (radio/TV/film)
- School Web site
- Independent student publication (print, web, etc.)
- Journalism/media/writing organization(s)/club(s)
- Journalism/media honor society(s)
- Attended journalism workshops
- Other (Please specify):

19. I took journalism course(s) in HIGH SCHOOL

- Yes
- No
- Journalism courses were not offered.

20. I participated in extra-curricular activities related to journalism in HIGH SCHOOL.

- Yes
- No (If no, SKIP to Question 22.)

21. If yes, please specify which extracurricular activities in HIGH SCHOOL.

- School newspaper
- Yearbook
- Literary magazine
- School broadcast production (radio/TV/film)
- School Web site
- Independent student publication (print, web, etc.)

- Journalism/media/writing organization(s)/club(s)
- Journalism/media honor society(s)
- Attended journalism workshops
- Other (Please specify):

22. Were you in a journalism leadership position in high school (an editor, a producer, or a club leader, etc.?)

- Yes
- No

The following questions relate to work experiences you may have had in journalism.

23. I have had, or am currently working, an internship or practicum related to journalism/media.

- Yes
- No

24. I presently work or have worked a full-time or part-time job in journalism/media that was not an internship.

- Full-time (at least 40 hours per week)
- Part-time
- No

Expectations

25. What are your expectations for a starting annual salary coming out of your college program?

- Higher than most fields in which college grads work
- About the same as most fields in which college grads work
- Less than most in which college grads work
- Don't know

26. The following statements relate to your feelings about finding work after leaving college. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel I will be capable of finding a good job.					
I feel I have the talent to find a good job.					
I feel I have the skills necessary to find a good job.					

The following question relates to your use of the media.

27. On average, how many HOURS PER DAY would you say you obtain information from the following media types?

Newspapers

Magazines and/or trade publications

Television

Radio

Journalism/news Web sites
(news, sports, entertainment info, etc.)

Social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Youtube, etc)

News Media

28. The following questions and statements relate to how well you think the news media do their jobs. Please indicate your opinions of the following?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The news media are believable.					
The news media are biased.					
The news media are accurate					
The news media are concerned about the community's well-being.					
The news media are concerned mostly about making profits.					
The news media have well-trained reporters.					
The news media sensationalize.					

Demographics

29. What is your age? _____

30. What is your gender?

-Male

-Female

31. To the best of your ability, indicate your race/ethnicity.

- African-American
- Asian or Asian-American
- Caucasian
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native American
- Other (Please specify):

32. What is your current GPA?

- <2.0
- 2.0-2.49
- 2.5-2.99
- 3.0-3.49
- 3.50-3.749
- 3.75 or higher
- Don't Know

33. It is very hard to determine people's socio-economic status, and the categories below are far from perfect. But to the best of your ability, please estimate which of the following categories you think best fits your family, in terms of income.

- Below middle class
- Middle class
- Middle to upper middle class
- Upper middle class to upper class
- I prefer not to answer

34. Please indicate your political leaning.

- Very Conservative
- ConservativeModerate
- Liberal
- Very Liberal
- None of these

35. Please indicate your political party affiliation.

- Republican
- Democrat
- Independent
- None of these

36. Please fill out the information below. Remember, your responses are kept confidential.

Student ID Number:

Professor's Name:

APPENDIX B: FOLLOW-UP SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Perceptions about the health of the Media Industry

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think the news media industry will be economically healthy when I graduate.					
I believe the news industry is adapting well to changing technologies.					
I think the news media industry will have plenty of jobs to offer when I graduate.					

**APPENDIX C: DESCRIPTIVE DATA ON SURVEY MEASURES: ALL RESPONDENTS
(N=454)**

	Work a full-time job	Work a part-time job	Attend graduate school	Don't know/Undecided
Plans after graduation	61.6 %	3.0 %	28.1 %	7.2 %

	I definitely will not	I probably will not	I might	I probably will	I definitely will
How likely are you to pursue a journalism job after graduating?	14.5 %	31.4 %	27.8 %	13.6 %	12.7 %
How likely are you to pursue a journalism CAREER after graduating?	20.3 %	36.1 %	21.4 %	10.4 %	11.7 %

	Full-time job related to journalism	Part-time job related to journalism	Internship related to journalism	None
Which of the following have you either search or interviewed for?	4.5 %	5.9 %	28.5 %	61.1 %

	I definitely will not	I probably will not	I might	I probably will	I definitely will
Newspapers	31.4 %	26.1 %	28.0 %	10.2 %	4.3 %
Magazines/Trade Publications	6.8 %	11.8 %	44.8 %	27.3 %	9.3 %
Digital online media (web, social media, mobile, etc.)	7.8 %	17.9 %	42.3 %	23.9 %	8.0 %
Broadcast journalism (radio/TV/film)	15.9 %	25.7 %	36.6 %	15.4 %	6.4 %
Teaching journalism	57.6 %	27.4 %	12.2 %	2.1 %	0.7 %

	In a journalism-related field	In another media-related field	Doing something else entirely	Don't know
Where do you hope to be working in 5 to 10 years	17.0 %	60.6 %	14.3 %	8.1 %

	Not at all committed	Slightly committed	Somewhat committed	Mostly committed	Completely committed
Commitment to the field of journalism	26.0 %	24.4 %	21.7 %	17.6 %	10.2 %

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I regret my decision to pursue journalism (as a profession or as a degree)	21.3 %	29.2 %	25.7 %	4.6 %	1.2 %	18.1 %
I am/would be proud to be in the journalism profession	2.1 %	8.8 %	31.6 %	27.5 %	20.3 %	9.7 %
I am enthusiastic about the journalism profession	5.5 %	13.4 %	31.1 %	20.0 %	17.3 %	12.7 %
I have put too much time and energy into the pursuit of journalism to change my career path now	12.7 %	27.6 %	24.7 %	14.3 %	4.6 %	16.1 %
There are no pressures to keep me from changing my career path in journalism	5.5 %	15.7 %	30.0 %	25.8 %	8.1 %	15.0 %
Changing my career path in journalism now would require personal sacrifice	9.2 %	22.2 %	26.8 %	17.8 %	6.7 %	17.3 %
I don't feel any obligation to maintain my career path in journalism	5.0 %	17.6 %	28.8 %	24.9 %	8.0 %	15.6 %
I feel a responsibility to continue in journalism because of journalism's service to the public	9.9 %	21.0 %	30.6 %	17.3 %	5.3 %	15.9 %
I would feel guilty if I left journalism	17.7 %	25.8 %	26.7 %	10.1 %	4.6 %	15.0 %

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I enjoy writing	3.2 %	6.7 %	14.9 %	46.1 %	29.1 %
I enjoy editing	6.9 %	17.0 %	28.4 %	31.4 %	16.3 %
I enjoy reporting/interviewing	4.6 %	16.3 %	25.5%	35.6 %	17.9 %
I enjoy photography and/or videography	1.1 %	7.8 %	20.2 %	40.6 %	30.3 %
I enjoy producing online/web media	3.2 %	11.7 %	33.4 %	33.6 %	18.1 %
I enjoy doing visual design	3.2 %	11.0 %	30.1 %	29.4 %	26.2 %

	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate
Year in college	27.5 %	31.7 %	30.5 %	8.5 %	1.8 %

	Journalism	PR	Advertising	Telecom & Film	Communication Studies	Undecided	Other
Major	22.4 %	46.5 %	14.0 %	2.3 %	2.1 %	0.7 %	12.1 %

	Yes	No
I participated in extra-curriculum activities related to journalism in COLLEGE	29.1 %	70.9 %
I participated in extra-curriculum activities related to journalism in HIGH SCHOOL	44.6 %	55.4 %
I held a journalism leadership position in high school (editor, producer, club leader, etc.)	25.1 %	74.9 %

Journalism Activity Participation	College	High School
School newspaper	50.4 %	48.5 %
Yearbook	13.7 %	57.7 %
Literary magazine	7.6 %	13.3 %
School broadcast production (TV/radio/film)	15.3 %	20.4 %
School Web site	11.5 %	9.7 %
Independent student publication (print, Web, etc.)	20.6 %	6.6 %
Journalism/media/writing organizations/clubs	25.2 %	12.8 %
Journalism/media honor society(s)	12.2 %	5.1 %
Attended journalism workshops(s)	26.0 %	10.2 %

	Yes	No	Journalism classes were not offered
I took journalism classes in high school.	31.8 %	36.4 %	31.8 %

	Yes	No
I have had or am working an internship or practicum related to journalism/media.	19.1 %	80.9 %

	Full-time (at least 40 hrs/wk)	Part-time	No
I presently work or have worked a full-time or part-time job in journalism/media that was not an internship	1.6 %	12.4 %	86.0 %

	Higher than most fields in which college grads work	About the same as most fields in which college grads work	Less than most fields in which college grads work	Don't know
Expectations for annual starting salary coming out of college	17.1 %	52.8 %	15.2 %	15.0 %

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The news media are believable	1.6 %	10.6 %	33.7 %	51.3%	2.8 %
The news media are biased	0.2 %	6.0 %	36.6 %	45.6 %	11.6 %
The news media are accurate	0.2 %	7.6 %	42.4 %	46.8 %	3.0 %
The news media are concerned with the community's well-being	1.8 %	16.9 %	40.4 %	36.7 %	4.2 %
The news media are concerned mostly about making profits	1.8 %	13.4 %	39.5 %	35.6 %	9.7 %
The news media have well-trained reporters	0.7 %	5.1 %	32.9	55.6 %	5.8 %
The news media sensationalize	0.7 %	6.2 %	45.5 %	35.1 %	12.5 %

	African-American	Asian or Asian-American	Caucasian	Hispanic or Latino	Native American
Gender	8.8 %	1.2 %	88.8 %	3.5 %	0.7 %

	Below middle class	Middle class	Middle to upper middle class	Upper middle class to upper class	I prefer not to answer
Socio-economic status	3.0 %	23.6 %	41.4 %	28.7 %	3.2 %

	Very conservative	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Very liberal	None of these
Political views	7.9 %	32.8 %	36.5 %	13.6 %	4.6 %	4.6 %