HOW MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION GRADUATES FIND JOBS

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HOW MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION
GRADUATES FIND JOBS

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ABSTRACT

With rising college student debt, questions about the return on investment for a degree in media and communication and perceived instability in the industry, students want to know how they will find jobs before loans are due. This small qualitative study explored successful job search strategies, behaviors, and characteristics of media and communication students who found full-time jobs in their field of study within three months of graduation and before 50% of their fellow graduates. The researcher interviewed in depth 11 “super graduates” with undergraduate four-year degrees earned from one urban, public, east coast media and communication college. Findings reveal that all participants leaned heavily on strong networks, mentors, and social capital to pave the way to their first job out of school. In addition, the study finds that participants, had proactive characteristics, focused early on their major, developed industry desired skills, had at least one internship, gained experience interviewing, and were involved in campus organizations. The study supports literature on the positive influence of mentors, social capital, and networking during college years to successfully launch a career, as well as the usefulness of LinkedIn. Implications include the need to educate media and communication students as early as possible about how to develop mentor relationships, networking skills, find internships, and the value of campus activities and career-related experiences.
Chapter 1: Introduction

There is growing skepticism about whether higher education institutions are worth the time and money, putting colleges and universities under pressure to demonstrate their value (Kelchen, 2018). With the increasing costs of college and student loan debt, higher education institutions have come under scrutiny from critics, including federal lawmakers, who want greater accountability (Kreighbaum, 2018). Among the criticisms is the need for accountability performance measures, particularly as they relate to job outcomes for college graduates.

Out of the 1.9 million bachelor’s degrees awarded between 2015–2016, 5% were for media and communication majors. The U.S. Department of Labor reported that the unemployment rate for college graduates in January 2017 was low at only 2.5% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Nevertheless, a study by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (2018) found that the current underemployment rate of recent college graduates, including journalism majors, is at 42%, meaning many journalism graduates are working in jobs that do not require degrees. The percentage of underemployment is even higher among media and communication majors: 46% underemployment for advertising majors, 55% of communication majors, and 56% of mass media majors (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2018).

These survey findings, taken as a whole, leave questions about the employability of students who graduate from media and communication programs. Although a growing number of studies pertain to accountability in higher education, including recent books
(e.g., Kelchen, 2018), contradictory results leave questions about why some college graduates are more likely than others to acquire full-time jobs.

Nevertheless, some graduates of media and communication programs find full-time jobs in their field of study before or within three months of graduation. The researcher seeks to determine if these super graduates of media and communication programs have common strategies, behaviors, or characteristics that helped them successfully find employment in a relatively short time so that career professionals can better coach and advise future graduates.

The researcher accomplished this research by conducting 11 in-depth interviews with college graduates from one U.S. college’s media and communication program. A media and communication program is broadly defined as one that focuses on some or all of these areas of study: journalism, digital media, television and radio broadcasting and production, marketing, advertising, public relations, intercultural and multi-linguistic communications, politics, public administration, performing arts, speech, rhetoric, and corporate communications (Communications-Major.com, 2019).

The current study uniquely straddled several different types of literature to form its foundation. Studies on career placement success of college graduates in the field of media and communication indicate that social capital, networking, and networking/tie strength are essential ingredients (Neidorf, 2008; Van Hoye, Hooft & Leivens, 2009). Therefore, the researcher grounded the study in the framework presented by Neidorf (2008) using social capital theory, networking, and weak ties to explain the study’s basis. In the pages that follow, the study defines social capital, networking, and weak ties,
reviews the literature, and explains how social capital, networking, and weak ties relate to the current study.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions served to guide this research.

RQ1: What characteristics do the media and communication graduate have that results in a successful job-search outcome leading to a full-time job?

RQ2: What characteristics of the job search are used that result in a successful job search outcome leading to a full-time job?

RQ3: What is the role of social capital (e.g., education, credentials, experiences via internships) in the job search process leading to a full-time job in media and communication?

RQ4: What are the roles of networking and strong vs. weak ties in relationships in the job search process leading to a full-time job in media and communication?
Chapter 2: Literature Review

As noted above, the literature review follows on the heels of Neidorf’s (2008) pioneering study that examined how journalism school graduates searched for newsroom jobs, as well as the characteristics and strategies they used that helped or hurt their job search efforts. As with the Neidorf study, the current research drew on several different types of literature, including social capital theory, networking, and weak ties. Where the current study diverged from the Neidorf work was the inclusion of a broader range of media and communication programs—not only journalism (i.e., print jobs) as examined by Neidorf.

Social Capital and Networks

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) defined social capital as networked obligations (i.e., connections) that in certain circumstances, can be converted into economic capital. Bourdieu and Wacquant viewed social capital as distinct from physical capital or human capital. Coleman (1988) built on the work of Bourdieu and Wacquant and defined social capital as a network or social structure that allows for certain actions by actors to take place within that system. For Coleman, social capital has the benefit of allowing people in a community to gain access to resources they otherwise would not have in their networks. These definitions are essential to understand how a media and communication graduate’s relationships with people (e.g., social networks) might facilitate action that benefits their ability to obtain a full-time job.

Indeed, much has been written about how social networks impact a person’s ability to find jobs, and especially a first job. A social network includes friends, relatives,
acquaintances, fellow alumni, professors, co-workers; and can give a person access to information, contacts, and leads to jobs that a company has not yet posted. The assets, resources, and accessibility attainable through a person’s social network is social capital (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). As Van Hoye et al. (2009) noted, networking is a commonly recommended job search strategy, but empirical research on the topic is somewhat scarce. Based on social capital theory, Flap and Boxman (cited in Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2001) found the strength of a person’s social capital is dependent on the size and quality of those in a person’s social network, and the members’ wealth, status, and social ties. Social capital, then, as described by Lin (1981), are the resources that are accessible through the members of one’s social network. Reliance on friends, family, and inside contacts in high places could help not only secure suitable jobs, but also provides a safety net during hard times (Neidorf, 2008).

The research on social capital is relevant in the field of media and communication where who one knows can be critical in launching a career. Communication organizations, such as newsrooms, public relations agencies, and advertising agencies can be fast-paced and team-oriented, cliquey, and resistant to outsiders. A new employee must be socially compatible with other members of the group to be accepted and succeed in the tight-knit media community. Who gets hired can also be subjective in a field that sometimes lacks clear criteria, making it an industry where connections and recommendations are valuable social capital (Becker et al., 1993).

**Networking and Weak Ties**

Mark Granovetter (1973) produced groundbreaking work discovering the importance of weak ties as valuable social capital for job seekers. Granovetter found
strong social ties, including family and friends, would probably only know about the same job opportunities as the job seeker. Weak ties, however, including people one only sees occasionally or people connected through others, could provide information about new job opportunities outside of one’s usual network. Weak ties can provide information not known through strong ties, thus expanding job opportunities (Granovetter, 1973). Later, Granovetter concluded, “Weak ties are an important resource in making possible mobility opportunity (p. 1373).” Granovetter’s (1995) work also found many job opportunities are never communicated through formal sources so that if job seekers do not find them through informal sources, they will not be aware they can apply.

In addition, the research of Portes and Landolt (1996) found that those who lack social capital may find it detrimental to their job search. Networks might close ranks and share opportunities only with those who are connected.

The research of Marmaros and Sacerdote (2002) supports the idea that it is who you know that makes a difference in the job search and salary offered. They surveyed almost 600 Dartmouth graduates and found that those who used fraternity connections were 21% more likely to accept a high paying job.

All of these studies are highly relevant to graduates of media and communication schools looking for their first jobs. Those who have amassed more social capital during their college years by networking with visiting professionals, recruiters, and professors with ties to the industry, and mentors at internships, may experience an advantage during their job search. In addition, media and communication colleges with influential alumni, exclusive club, or fraternity/sorority connections, may provide another network of weak ties available to students.
A small qualitative study by Neidorf (2008) researched 16 graduates of journalism schools and found that those who completed internships and created some professional connections had more success using social networks to find a job. Neidorf suggested more research was required in this area. Likewise, the work of Greenberg and Fernandez (2016) further supports the value of weak ties for new graduates looking for their first job. They surveyed 700 MBA students graduating in 2009 and 2010 about their job search channels. The researchers found that students were more likely to accept job offers that came through weak ties albeit the salaries could be thousands of dollars less than offers from other employers or on-campus recruiters. While it would seem a job that offers 17% less in pay would be undesirable, students who found jobs through faculty or fellow students saw the potential for future growth and non-pecuniary benefits.

Media and communication students are known to take low salaries in small media markets to gain experience in hopes that there is potential for growth and that they will eventually move up to larger markets. Some of these jobs undoubtedly come through the influence of social capital and weak ties. For example, Wanberg, Kanfer, and Banas (2000) conducted an extensive study of 500 unemployed workers in Minnesota and found that 36% acquired their next jobs by networking with friends, family, and previous co-workers. The results indicate that networking intensity is associated with lower levels of unemployment (although the authors warned that networking should not be considered superior to traditional job-search techniques). Nevertheless, the issue of networking intensity is worth exploring in learning how media and communication students strategize to find their first jobs.
Van Hoye et al.’s (2009) research demonstrated that the effectiveness of networking behaviors seems to depend on the company positions of the contacts in the job seekers’ social networks. In other words, a network that includes connections to people higher up in an organization is more valuable and effective in a job search. Van Hoye (2017) suggested in her review of job search behaviors that more research is needed to determine which job search behaviors are best for different objectives.

Applying these ideas to the field of media and communication, a successful job search for an extroverted television news journalist may require a different networking method than one conducted by an introverted graphic designer. If these studies are correct, connections higher up in a media organization, although they are weak ties, could prove more valuable in a job search for a new graduate.

The online professional social network, LinkedIn, has made it possible for job seekers to extend social networks and increase social capital with weak ties. LinkedIn has over 563 million members worldwide and promises to “connect the world’s professionals to make them more productive and successful…” (LinkedIn, 2018, para. 3). Researcher, Sonja Utz (2016), found that LinkedIn provided participants in her study the highest job informational benefits among online social platforms.

Peterson and Dover (2014) taught LinkedIn classes that required over 100 sales and marketing undergraduate students to create a LinkedIn profile. Assignments to join LinkedIn groups and connect online with professionals led to interviews and jobs for some of their students. Though the study was not specific about how many students had successful job outcomes, it is more evidence that students build social capital through LinkedIn at no cost and a small investment of time.
A survey conducted by LinkedIn and the Adler Group (Adler, 2016) reported that 85% of those surveyed said that they obtained their current position as a result of networking efforts. The president of Career Horizons, Matt Youngquist, told National Public Radio, “at least 70%, if not 80% of jobs are not published” and are filled internally or with applicants who are referred internally (Kaufman, 2011) providing support for Granovetter’s (1973) findings. Once more, there is compelling research that the strength of social capital and the ability to identify and use valuable networking resources online is another important career development skill that may be more critical in the field of media and communication where applicants are expected to have an online presence and be social media savvy.

**Job Search Behaviors, Personalities, and Characteristics**

The literature suggested there are numerous other job search behaviors, personalities, and characteristics that may impact networking and successful job hunting. Saks and Ashforth (2000) found that job seekers with high self-esteem were more likely to receive job offers and that the duration of their job hunt was shorter than those with low self-esteem. Additionally, Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy, and Shalhoop (2006) conducted research that suggested a pro-active personality significantly impacts the success of college graduates’ job searches. The authors defined pro-active personality as a “tendency to take personal initiative across a range of activities and situations (p. 717).” The researchers surveyed 180 graduating seniors where their findings suggested that a successful first job search requires initiative and self-direction.

A study of public relations (P.R.) and advertising students participating in student-run communications agencies found that experiential learning helped position
them for success and helped them get hired (Bush, Haygood, & Vincent, 2016). Other studies indicated those who are lacking “networking comfort” (Wanberg et al., 2000, p. 499) or those with “job interview anxiety” (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004, p. 633) are viewed negatively by employers. These studies pointed to the possibility that networking and interviewing skills make a difference in hiring decisions. Student-run communication agencies often have professional guest speakers and networking events. Those with more experience in these situations may be more networking comfortable with less interviewing anxiety.

Mentoring college students as they prepare for a job search may also give graduates more confidence. Renn, Steinbauer, Taylor, and Detwiler (2014) studied almost 100 students at a large university who were mentored for eight months by business professionals. Results showed students’ self-efficacy improved career planning and intentions and decreased procrastination and failure to network.

An exploratory mixed-methods study of hospitality management graduating seniors found those who received job offers differed from those who did not. Seniors who were offered jobs had more quality internships, leadership experiences, and displayed more professionalism and successful interviewing skills (Kwok, Adams, & Feng, 2012). The study used career development professionals in the field of hospitality management to help develop specific skills with students who had not received job offers. Media and communication career development professionals could use a similar type of study specific to the industry to guide their efforts.

Media and communication employers have been surveyed about desired hard skills (i.e., video editing, AP writing style) and soft skills (reliability, eloquence, and
persistence) they look for when hiring (Cooper & Tang, 2010). More recently, job postings for journalists showed an increased demand for skills in social media and audience engagement. They also showed a trend in seeking candidates with web/multimedia skills, teamwork skills, and the ability to work under pressure within tight deadlines (Wenger, Owens, & Cain, 2018).

In a comprehensive review of job search literature, Van Hoye (2017) suggested that all dimensions of job search behavior must be considered to understand job search successes. The researcher made particular conclusions to help job seekers and counselors, including that a job search should be a full-time job; time and effort make a difference. Job seekers should not rely on a single job search behavior. Instead, informal job searches are as important as networking with people with higher occupational statuses. Intensity is not enough; behaviors must be carried out in a high-quality manner. Clear specific goals and self-efficacy are important.

A meta-analytic review of 47 experimental and quasi-experimental job search studies found similar evidence of strategies and behaviors that improve job outcomes. Researchers found the odds of finding employment were 2.67% higher when job seekers were taught job search skills, including how to seek help from their social network and how to take a proactive approach. Young job seekers were one of two groups most improved when they were taught techniques on how to search for a job and better present themselves in interviews (Liu, Huang, & Wang, 2014).

While Van Hoye’s (2017) review of relevant literature indicated a job search likely involves a multidimensional approach, the current study sought to learn if there are
specific behaviors and strategies critical to a new graduate in the field of media and communication.
Chapter 3: Methods

Research Questions

The following research questions served to guide this research.

RQ1: What characteristics does the media and communication graduate have that results in a successful job-search outcome leading to a full-time job?

RQ2: What characteristics of the job search are used that result in a successful job search outcome leading to a full-time job?

RQ3: What is the role of social capital (e.g., education, credentials, experiences via internships) in the job search process leading to a full-time job in media and communication?

RQ4: What are the roles of networking and strong vs. weak ties in relationships in the job search process leading to a full-time job in media and communication?

Methodology

The method used for this study was qualitative in-depth interviews, defined as a research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of people to elicit their views and opinions on a particular subject (Creswell, 2014). The researcher selected a semi-structured interview due to its advantages in focusing the interview with a set of planned questions. It also allowed the respondents to speak in a conversational style. The researcher kept the questions open-ended to allow recent graduates to offer their interpretation of their experiences in finding jobs, to determine what made them successful, and to learn what did and did not work for them. Participants sometimes offered views or experiences that were unexpected and provided
new insights into the job search process. While maintaining flexibility during the interviews, the researcher ensured that she covered the topic list.

Participants

Participants for this study were part of a convenience sample of 11 undergraduates from a media/communication program at an urban, public, east coast higher education institution in the United States. A convenience sample is defined as data collection from population members conveniently available to participate in the study (Convenience Sampling, 2019). The researcher preferred a convenience sample for this study because of the accessibility of participants for rich, detailed explanations of job search strategies for recent media and communication graduates. A media/communication program is defined as one that focuses on areas that include some or all of these majors: journalism, digital media, television and radio broadcasting and production, marketing, advertising, public relations, intercultural and multi-linguistic communications, politics and public administration, performing arts, speech, rhetoric and corporate communications (Communications-Major, 2019).

Similar to Neidorf (2008), the researcher selected a small number of participants. It is common in qualitative studies that take an interview approach to select fewer participants (Creswell, 2014). Since the goal was to understand what characteristics and strategies of the job search behaviors led to a successful first job, it was essential to select participants from among those who had gotten jobs within three months of earning their bachelor of arts degree in media and communication. The researcher’s job as director of career services at a media and communication college was helpful toward that end.
Specifically, the researcher recruited participants by first reviewing the college’s National Association of Colleges and Employers (2018) First Destination Survey. The researcher reviewed the data to search for graduates from the college of media and communication who reported gaining full-time jobs in their field by the end of August 2018.

Subsequently, the researcher created a list of May 2018 graduates who met those qualifications. Graduates on the list represented the departments of advertising, public relations, media studies and production, and journalism and communication studies. From that list, the researcher created a smaller list of 16 graduates to represent a cross-section of media and communication majors, genders, and ethnic diversity. This mix of ethnicity, major, and gender offered the best possibility of documenting rich and varied job search behaviors and experiences from in-depth interviews to compare for trends, similarities, and to contrast for differences.

Using alumni email addresses, the researcher sent invitations to participate in the study to qualifying potential participants. The researcher provided them with an explanation of the research and the process involving in-depth interviews with the understanding that their identities would be confidential and not released in the study. The researcher explained that their voluntary participation would help career services professionals and future students. The researcher offered no incentives to participate. The interviews took place on campus, virtually online, or by phone.

In some cases, there was no response to the invitation. Subsequently, the researcher sent emails to other graduates from the original list until the researcher satisfied the convenience sample as close as possible to the planned cross-section the
researcher sought for ethnic diversity, major, and gender. The researcher started the interviews before achieving her goal of 16 participants when compelling similarities between participant experiences became evident. She discontinued sending invitations and finalized the convenience sample with 11 participants.

The final convenience sample of participants included four males and seven females. Three participants were racially diverse. Three participants were advertising majors, three were public relations majors, two were journalism majors, two were media studies and production majors, and one was a communication studies major.

Though differences in a successful job search between majors, genders, or between White and ethnic minorities was not a focus of this study, the researcher hoped having a mix of media and communication majors, males and females, and White and ethnic minority participants in the sample would elicit some additional valuable information.

**Data Collection and Transcription**

Each participant interview was about one hour long, as recommended by prior studies (Creswell, 2014). This interview length helped to ensure that participants devoted adequate time to answer all questions sufficiently with time available to explore additional avenues if needed. Wolburg (2001) suggested audiotaping interview sessions followed by transcribing the results so that data is complete. Therefore, the researcher recorded interviews using either the audio recording function of a video camera or the voice memo function of her iPhone. The researcher uploaded the audio interviews to a data collection and analysis software program for qualitative research called MAXQDA.
and completed transcriptions of the interviews using the same software. In addition to recordings, the researcher made handwritten notes.

Demant and Järvinen (2011) recommend anonymity when transcribing recorded interviews. Therefore, the researcher assigned participants with aliases to protect their identities and also to differentiate their voices within the context of the research. The researcher examined the transcription to ensure it was both complete and accurate for quality control purposes.

**Data Analysis**

Once the transcription was complete, the researcher analyzed the data using a social scientific method called the constant comparative method. As outlined by Glaser (2008), the constant comparative method is a systematic way to analyze interview group data to determine potential categories and themes that answer the research questions.

Constant comparative analysis is a valuable tool for analyzing qualitative data, but it should be noted that there is some confusion in the literature surrounding appropriate uses and executions of this research tool (Grove, 1988), which can affect the validity of the study. I followed the steps outlined by Grove (1988) to enhance validity, particularly the process of sorting the data from the recorded interviews that the researcher used in determining categories arising from the analysis. In addition to the constant comparative method, the researcher used selective coding to determine overarching concepts and subsequent categories.

Selective coding is common in qualitative studies that rely on interview methods and involves reading and re-reading the transcripts while selectively coding data that relates to the core variables of interest (Gallicano, 2013). For example, the current
research seeks to understand job search behavior approaches and strategies that lead to a successful job outcome. The open code was job search behavior approaches. The researcher identified subsequent properties of the open code from the transcripts (e.g., internships, interviewing, mentors, networking). Using MAXQDA software, she created a table outlining open codes, properties, and participants’ words. The researcher used the table to make decisions about the core variables of the study. Using selective coding helped the researcher understand the participants’ responses more fully and to illustrate conclusions.

**Interview Script**

As noted above, the interview script was semi-structured rather than unstructured. A semi-structured interview script is defined as one with a series of predetermined but open-ended questions, allowing space for some spontaneity in follow-up questions (Given, 2008). The researcher reasoned that a semi-structured interview script was advantageous for interviewing recent graduates to pause, probe, and prompt appropriately and provide a more natural means for study participants to respond.

Structured, open-ended questions asked during the interviews are provided in the Appendix relating to each research question. The script ensured that the researcher asked an adequate number of questions to address the research questions adequately. However, because the interviews were semi-structured, the researcher sometimes used responses from participants as a springboard for additional follow-up questions. In other words, the researcher could not anticipate every question she asked during the interviews in the interview script; however, the basic questions the researcher used to address the research questions are provided in the Appendix.
Chapter 4: Analysis/Results

The researcher intended to determine if there were common strategies, behaviors, and characteristics of media and communication students who found full-time employment in their field of study within three months of graduation. The researcher interviewed 11 graduates of a public, east coast media and communication college who worked in their field at the time of this study. These interviews were structured to answer the following four research questions: (a) What characteristics of the graduate results in a successful job-search outcome leading to a full-time job? (b) What characteristics of the job search are used that result in a successful outcome leading to a full-time job? (c) What is the role of social capital in the job search process leading to a full-time job? (d) What are the roles of networking and strong vs. weak ties in relationships in the job search process leading to a full-time job?

The qualitative technique of constant comparative coding was used to analyze the data. The researcher coded the interviews as themes emerged about common academic and career development experiences, feelings, characteristics, attributes, social capital, networking behavior, and strategies related to their job search. The researcher also noted any differences or unique experiences.

At the time of the study, television stations employed two of the graduates as news producers, public relations agencies hired two of the graduates as assistant account executives, a television station employed one of the graduates as a news reporter, one was hired in marketing as a paid search associate, an advertising agency employed one of the graduates as an associate art director, a newspaper hired one of the graduates as a sports
reporter, a radio station employed one of the graduates in their promotions department, a live venue hired one of the graduates as a marketing coordinator, and an event production company employed one of the graduates as a project manager.

All of the participants graduated in May of 2018. Four participants were male, and seven were female. Three were racially diverse. Three were transfer students, and one of the transfer students was also a first-generation college student. All were in their early twenties. As previously mentioned, the researcher invited potential participants to the study based on the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2018) First Destination Survey showing that the graduate had a full-time job in their field of study within three months of graduation. Out of that potential pool of participants, the researcher attempted to create a convenience sample of graduates representing different media and communication majors, genders, and ethnicity. Following is an analysis based on the research findings relating to each research question.

RQ1: What Characteristics of the Graduate Result in a Successful Job-Search Outcome Leading to a Full-Time Job?

Participants had internships, professional activities, and good grades. The researcher did not consider factors such as GPA, internships, and professional activities as these were not known when she selected potential participants and invited them into this study. Nevertheless, once selected, their self-reported profiles revealed they had much in common related to academics and activities connected to their chosen career path.

1. Seven participants reported having high grade point averages, academic scholarships, and honors. All others reported good grades in their major.
2. All participants reported having at least one internship.

3. Seven participants had three or more internships.

4. All participants were involved in at least one on-campus media outlet or professional organization while in college.

The following is a profile of each participant based on their recollection of their career activities and academics. The researcher did not ask for their exact GPA. For purposes of confidentiality and to identify each participant’s voice, the researcher assigned aliases to represent each participant.

Scott was a media studies and production major. A small market television station hired him as a news producer before graduation. While attending college, Scott’s experience included two television internships, four years as a producer for campus television, and one freelance/full-time job with a major market television station. He said he graduated cum laude.

Frank was an advertising major. Within weeks of graduation, a national health and wellness media agency hired him as a paid search associate. While still in college, he had four advertising/marketing internships, participated in three national advertising/marketing competitions, and was a leader in a campus organization. He said he graduated with a high GPA.

Kia, an African American student, majored in journalism. She had worked as a news production assistant at a major market station. Within six months of graduation, a small market television station hired her as a full-time news reporter. While in college, she held three internships, one television fellowship, and was president of her campus
chapter of black journalists for three years. She reported that she had good grades in her major.

Oscar was a journalism major. A major market newspaper hired him full-time as a freelance sports desk reporter, and a small, hometown newspaper hired him six months later as a full-time sports reporter. During college, he had four sports reporting internships, three freelance editor and reporting jobs, and worked two years as a sports editor for his campus newspaper. He said he graduated with honors and had an academic scholarship.

Cara was a public relations major. She was hired as an account executive one month out of college at a major market, marketing and public relations firm. Her experience during college included four public relations internships, directorship of a student-run public relations firm her senior year, and was an active member in a public relations professional organization for three years. She said she graduated with honors.

Lisa was a public relations major. She transferred to the college in her junior year and was a first-generation college student. She was hired one month after graduation as a marketing coordinator for a national sports venue company. During college, she had five internships in her junior and senior years and was an active member of a public relations organization. She reported that she graduated with a 3.8 GPA.

Mary was a public relations major. She transferred to the college in her sophomore year. Before graduating, a public relations agency in Philadelphia hired her as an account executive. During college, she had five public relations-related internships and had leadership roles in a student-run public relations firm and a campus public relations organization. She said that she always earned As in her communication classes.
Amy was an advertising major. She is a member of a minority group. Amy was hired directly after graduation into a major market as a project manager for an event production company. Her experience during college included three internships, two student worker jobs—including campus ambassador—was a member of a campus advertising club, was a brand ambassador, and held two part-time jobs related to the advertising industry. She reported that she graduated with a good GPA.

Andrew was a communication studies major. He was hired directly after college to a major market radio station as a marketing promotions assistant. During college, Andrew had one internship, was a member of an academic honors club and a campus marketing organization, and had one summer marketing job. He said that his grades were good.

Sarah was an advertising major. She transferred to the college in her junior year utilizing several scholarships. She was hired one month after graduation as an associate art director at a national advertising agency. During college, she had two internships, (one during a study-away in Italy), participated in one national competition, was a member of a campus advertising club and a fashion club, and volunteered for campus activities using her design skills. She said she graduated magna cum laude.

Anita, a minority student, majored in media studies and production. One month after graduation, a small market television station hired her as a news producer. Her experience during college included two internships, three years as a producer of a campus sports news broadcast, and one part-time job as a television news production assistant in a major market. She said she did her best work in the classes that were in her major.
Participants had positive attributes, characteristics, and feelings. Every participant was asked to describe the personal attributes they felt best helped them succeed in their job search. Every one of them described themselves in favorable terms, i.e., go-getter, outgoing, personable, strong work ethic, perseverance, and personality. Without prompting from the interviewer, all went beyond the question to further explain their philosophy for success. Some representative samples include:

Sarah: “I believe in myself…I don’t accept failure.”

Oscar: “…taking opportunity and running with it…”

Scott: “I just like putting that positive energy out.”

Lisa: “As a whole, you need to have an optimistic personality…”

Andrew: “Be ready. Be dependable….I definitely am confident.”

Frank: “Just be who you are, and that will show through.”

All participants were ready to explain their personalities and determination to succeed. When asked about self-esteem and self-motivation as it related to their job searches, their responses were mixed. A few admitted self-esteem could be a struggle:

Sarah: “I’m hard on myself and compare myself to others.”

Andrew: “… low points, hard times…when self-esteem and confidence were low…kept plugging away…”

Lisa: “The most important thing I had to teach myself at (college)…is to unapologetically be myself.”

Some participants talked about how their goals kept them going:

Anita: “I knew what I wanted. It helped me to stay motivated.”
Oscar: “My goal was for my Grandpop to see me (byline) in the (local newspaper).

Mary: “I always had a career goal.”

When the researcher asked participants how they would describe their stress or worry about finding a job, responses varied. Two reported that they were completely confident they would find a job in their field quickly, while others expressed the nervousness felt or pressure they placed on themselves.

Amy: “So stressful. I called my mother a lot for advice…”

Lisa: “I think professors put so much emphasis about the job search. That’s so anxiety-producing. It literally drives you insane.”

Kia: “I wanted to graduate with a job…The stress was put myself in a good place to land a job.”

Andrew: “You have friends and stuff. They’re finding jobs quickly, maybe in the business school (before graduation). You can’t help but feel a little stressed.”

Frank: “My biggest level of worry was: is it the right job, not would I get the job.”

Cara: “It’s a lot of unknown, uncertainty…I was definitely concerned I was not going to find the right position or that I wouldn’t meet my deadline of getting a job by end of summer. There was definitely pressure I put on myself.”

All of the participants expressed a certain amount of confidence in their dress, social etiquette, and appearance. Some mentioned learning social skills, proper attire, handshakes, and etiquette in special college career development classes and at their internships.
Anita: “I learned all of that in senior sem (seminar). . . . The H.R. person at (television station) told me to dress for the job that you want, not the job that you have. So, I always took that with me from then until now.”

Kia reported she worked at a part-time job at the Banana Republic in her senior year so that she could get an employee discount and have the ability to afford clothes for interviewing.

Participants expressed confidence in knowledge, skills, and experience. All of the participants expressed feelings of confidence to enter their career of choice through knowledge and experience they gained in college. Answers varied about which experiences prepared them the most. Two participants said internships were most important. Three participants mentioned that their curriculum was the principal reason they felt prepared. Five participants mentioned on-campus media organizations and activities as their primary source for building confidence in their abilities. Nevertheless, all of the participants acknowledged the value of having a mix of internships, participation in professional organizations, and classes focused on their major.

Oscar: “I considered myself to have 2–3 years of reporting experience by the time I graduated (from the campus paper and internships).”

Lisa: “100% (confident). . . . College and (this college), in general, does such a good job teaching you the academic side of things and the reality of the field. . . . I could say I know for a fact how to write a press release. I know how to do media advisories. I bring something to the table.”
Sarah: “(In classes), I didn’t feel challenged to the point where I was learning …we get so crammed. You have to memorize this information, but we don’t get to figure out how to apply it. I got a job. I guess I knew enough.”

Frank: “Internships gave me something to latch onto in interviews…I would say real-life experience helped enrich my classroom experience. Sometimes it helped affirm what I was learning in the classroom. It just made me more confident when I went to interview.”

Cara: “(The student-run public relations agency) definitely kick-started my career before I graduated. I literally walked into interviews and said I have experience with that.”

Kia: “I feel like the journalism curriculum (was most important). I tell you, one of the biggest things I get complimented on is writing. Freshman and sophomore year, those classes are all writing. It kind of made me stick out.”

When asked about whether they thought their GPA made a difference in getting a full-time job, every participant expressed the feeling or belief that it was mostly a non-factor.

Mary: “I didn’t feel GPA was very important. I was never a wonderful student (but) I always got A’s in communication classes.”

Scott: “I graduated cum laude. It never came up in interviews. It was on my resume. They probably noticed. As for classes, I definitely got more outside of classes.”

One participant believed his high GPA mattered most while in college to help him get competitive internships or scholarships.
Oscar: “Luckily, I had a good one (GPA). Some people remarked. Some didn’t mention it at all. When I got my internship, maybe it mattered; but, when I applied for a job, it didn’t.”

Participants focused early on career goals and career paths by junior year. One theme that emerged during interviews was how early participants started focusing on their career goals during college. Four participants said they knew precisely what they wanted to do with their careers when they entered college. Mary is an excellent example of that early focus. Mary: “My first internship was at IHeartMedia my senior year of high school. As a freshman, I was at (community college), and the whole year, I was part of the (community college) television group. They didn’t have PR classes…I had my interview to join (student-run public relations agency) before I even got to campus (as a sophomore). My mom found it online.”

Three others described feeling connected firmly to a career path by their sophomore year. Frank described this as when he *settled*. Frank: “You can’t look for jobs your senior spring semester. It starts when you settle, and I started to settle in my sophomore year. I started to settle into advertising, and then I knew I needed internships and clubs and projects, and I was able to line up those ducks in a row, knowing that all those building blocks were necessary.”

By junior year, the four other participants in the study said that they committed to a career path and expressed an awareness of the need for activities and internships that would most likely help them reach their goals. Even if it took some experimenting to find a major, they were committed once they found something they liked. Sarah switched from liberal arts to the college of fine arts, and finally, into the college of media and
communication. She said, “Junior year, I started dipping myself into advertising and loving it. I realized mass communications was the way I wanted to share. I took my first art direction class, and I just got more and more excited about it.”

By the time the participants were seniors, they were involved in professional organizations on campus, had taken advantage of career-related activities, like career fairs, and had at least one internship on their resume (except Andrew). Andrew’s communication studies major did not require an internship; however, he said he was motivated to get one. Andrew: “I was a reliable worker, but I had trouble getting an internship. There were just things happening out of my control. One time I couldn’t get it because I needed college credit. “ Andrew did land an internship during the fall semester of his senior year, and he said it became an important network connection to getting his job after graduation.”

**RQ 2: What Characteristics of the Job Search are Used That Result in a Successful Outcome Leading to a Full-Time Job?**

All participants found jobs through their network or networking strategies. All eleven participants described using a few different strategies to look for a full-time job before or after graduation. All believed their least successful strategy was “blindly” applying for jobs through job sites or directly through the company website without any network connection to the organization. Cara called it applying to “the black hole.” Frank dismissed it as “ineffective and worthless.”
Scott: “I did apply to some stations online, and I never heard anything back.”

Anita: “I did apply to some…They never got back to me; I would say (most ineffective) where I applied directly through the company websites. I was applying to any job opening. I was applying to some jobs I probably wasn’t qualified for. Just taking a chance on myself.”

Amy: “I emailed (a high profile agency) 16,000 times, and they never got back to me. I didn’t know anyone there.”

Six participants mentioned using LinkedIn as the one job hunting or networking tool they found useful in discovering open positions and connecting with potential employers during their search. Anita found the job she would eventually accept through a LinkedIn posting, as did Amy. Amy said she first connected and communicated with the hiring manager through LinkedIn before applying for the position. Amy: “I saw a job posting (on LinkedIn). I connected with the hiring manager. (I messaged on LinkedIn) I love the work you do. I’d love to learn more…I applied as a part-time employee (while in school), and they hired me full-time (after graduation).”

All other participants had some network connection to the employer who eventually hired them. Frank said he was at a party where he met a (college) alumna and asked where she was working. She happened to be a recruiter at a company where Frank wanted to work. They also had mutual connections. He accepted an offer before he graduated. A television station hired Scott where (his college) alumni already knew him. They worked together at the campus television station. An agency hired Mary, where she had done a prior internship. A newspaper hired Oscar where his best friend worked, and then he changed jobs for a full-time staff position at a paper where he had a prior
An agency hired Sarah after making a connection with their recruiters at a networking/career event. A mentor/professor took her class to the event.

A company doing business with the organization where Andrew interned hired him. He also learned about the job opening at a college career fair. Kia was recruited when she attended the National Association of Black Journalists Conference career fair. A mentor paid for her plane ticket and registration. She was recommended for several jobs within a media company and accepted one of them. A company where she had a prior internship hired Lisa. Also, a professional mentor had recommended her for the job. A television station where three alumni were employees in the newsroom and who previously worked at the same campus television station hired Anita. A company hired Cara through an introduction and recommendation from a supervisor at a previous internship: “I would also keep track of my network connections from past internships and made sure I was circling back with them, and that’s ultimately how I got my job…”

Participants used interviewing experience gained during college. By the time study participants were interviewing for full-time jobs, they had some interviewing experience through their internships and part-time jobs. All but two spoke about being “a little nervous,” or how “nerve-wracking” the process was, or a mix of confidence and nerves. For example, Anita said, “In general, I think I do well in interviews because I’m quick on my feet. Sometimes I get nervous.”

Lisa explained how she learned the most about interviewing from a company that did not offer her an internship. When she asked the interviewer for feedback, she was told, “I couldn’t see the person you were. I couldn’t see your personality. It felt robotic
and monotone.” Lisa said after that, she stopped memorizing answers and worked on being herself in interviews.

Only Oscar said he did not have a routine before an interview. He said, “To be honest, I don’t think there was much preparation. I just tried to calm myself more than anything. I was pretty confident in my abilities.” All other participants described doing research and preparation for interviews. Frank described his interview preparation as “intense.” “I brought case studies, leave-behinds, extra resumes, pens, and papers. I would spend 20 minutes before the interview writing down 15 questions just in case my brain halted to keep the conversation going. I would also do incredible research about the company, job, about current events within that space. I wasn’t trying to learn a skill set overnight. I was just making sure the interview was as positive and as smooth as possible.”

Amy said, “I did a lot of research on the companies, people who were working at those companies. I used LinkedIn a lot. I had a lot of time with my mom; how to answer questions.” Others described similar preparation, and all participants spoke about following up with thank you notes, mostly email. Cara said, “I love snail mail, but I don’t think it’s always the best. Too slow. An email thank you, 100%, to the interviewer; and then if you are connecting with the H.R. person on a separate email chain and expressing your interest in the position, why you’re a good candidate, being as transparent as possible. ‘I have recommendations if you need them. I have writing samples if you need them.’”

Mary said, “I left (phone) messages. Assertively, but not to the point I annoyed. Later that afternoon, I would email and say, thank you. If I didn’t hear back within a
week, I would email… mention something we talked about, or I read this and thought of you.”

**RQ 3: What is the Role of Social Capital in the Job Search Process Leading to a Full-Job?**

**Participants capitalized on a college degree and college connections.** All participants had the perception that a degree from their college had value in the job marketplace and that it helped open doors for them. The following comments are representative of those feelings.

Amy said, “The (college) name has more than I realized. Back in Ohio, my dad would tell people I’m at (this college)... People would act like it’s an Ivy League school. Someone would always know someone who went to (this college).”

Frank said, “Every job offered was initiated through a (college) connection…”

Scott said, “I ended up at a station where there is the ‘entire graduation class’ here. That was a pretty big thing. Just them knowing I was from (this college).”

Anita said, “Just look at the job I have now. There are four of us here... I know being a grad (from this college) will help me.”

Mary said, “People in media made me feel like I went to Harvard: my street cred from (this college).”

Participants created social capital with mentors. All 11 participants in the study enthusiastically talked about people they felt were particularly important in their career development and their ability to get a job quickly in their field of study. Eight participants had what college career professionals would refer to as a “constellation of mentors.”
They described a combination of professors and professionals, fellow students, and family members advising them and opening doors to career opportunities along the way.

Sarah said, “Professor M. was a great, great designer. I called her and Professor T. when I got my offers. And Professor G. gave me mentoring support. (I ) really value mentorship because we have no idea what we’re doing. I always just trusted them. They had my best interest at heart. And Professor C., what a great guy, helping me to (study away) in Rome. You can tell the ones who are really there for you.”

Kia said, “I had a lot of good ‘hands-on’ people within the (state): ABJ (Association of Black Journalists) and professors, Sports Update (class/activity). I wouldn’t be where I am without Professor F. One of my (professional) mentors who I met, paid for my plane ticket and registration for the national conference (National Association of Black Journalists).”

Oscar said, “E.J. went to high school with me…He was the editor at our high school newspaper. He had me covering everything (for the college newspaper). He’s the kind of guy I relied on for everything… I have a guy down the street, J.S., who worked at the (local newspaper). So, having him, I like talking to him….My uncle had a friend in the industry, J.R., good to bounce ideas off of… Professor D., he’s covering teams too, so he can tell you what you are doing wrong or doing right….”

Frank said, “My friends. I was lucky to have surrounded myself with equally intelligent, driven friends. (They) made me strategic. Ultimately the reason I chose one job over another was because of a professor. I called Professor G…a professor who works in my industry.”
Scott said, “At every stage of my life, I’ve always found myself a mentor, which I think is really important as to how I got to where I am. First, one was M., a fellow student who took me under her wing. She was like, ‘You want to do this? I’ll get you there.’ And then, Professor P. and P.G., Professor A. and L., the Mt. Rushmore of finding a job. . . I also relied on those I met at (a local television station)….I stay in touch with a high school journalism teacher that really helped me out…”

Cara said, “Professor G.F. had a huge influence on my career…He helped me so much as a faculty advisor…making sure you secure those connections. Professor B., Professor R., I definitely asked them where should I apply, what would be a good fit.”

Anita said, “Definitely Professor F., because he always saw in me certain things I didn’t see in myself. I was very hard on myself…he’d have to talk me off a ledge (and say) just because I’m giving you critiques does not mean you aren’t good at what you are doing…I just see things that can make things better…Second, would be (local television news director) A.W. He just pushed me to do things I never thought I would do… Even after I left my internship, he’d be on me (asking) ‘did you apply to be a P.A.? Did you do this? Did you do that?’ And I think that really helped me.”

Lisa said, “I genuinely don’t think I would be where I am without the professors: Professor G.F. and Professor B. Sometimes it was tough love, but sometimes tough love is what you need…. M.K. worked in H.R. for Comcast Spectacor; she was always the one reaching out to me. She stayed in touch with me throughout my college career. She knew how bad I wanted to be in this industry.” As the only first-generation college graduate in the study, Lisa also expressed that her parents were not able to support her in the same way her mentors did in giving her college and career advice. “It’s kind of nice for
someone (a mentor) who understands, understands the pressure (of college), the expectations your parents have for you…wanting to succeed for myself and my parents. For me, it was going to professors, advisors to help me figure it out.”

Andrew and Amy spoke about the influence of a family member as a mentor. Andrew’s father owns a small business, and he credits his father’s lessons about hard work and perseverance with his ability to secure a job in his field. Andrew said, “Doing whatever you can and not slacking off. One of the things people seem surprised about; you get it done. It’s just how I’ve always worked. Seeing my dad work. It’s just second nature.” Amy said, “My mom is in the marketing industry. She was a big part of teaching me how to network, any opportunity to network is important. She connected me to someone in her industry who mentored me. She gave me a lot of people to shadow.”

RQ4 What are the Roles of Networking and Strong vs. Weak Ties in Relationships in the Job Search Process Leading to a Full-Time Job?

Participants networked throughout college. Interviews with participants revealed they not only recognized the value of networking while in college, they consciously built networks and spent time on networking behaviors. Some mentioned LinkedIn and social media as networking tools they used. The researcher asked the participants how much time they spent on networking behaviors.

Mary said, “Aside from every hour of the day? (Networking), it’s constantly…(at my) first PRSSA meeting ever, the speaker that night was a networking coach with tips, tricks of being an effective networker…I ordered myself a real name tag. I got a padfolio, a business cardholder…I got better at doing all those things.”
Amy said, “(This college) was easy to build a network. You have all these resources to meet people. It was set up for you. Just come to this event, be involved in this organization. I grew my network working a job at (this college), different events outside of (this college), different mentors, networking events in the city, used my friends in the same industry and followed what they were doing.”

Kia said, “My social network was pretty big. I have over 2,700 followers on twitter I’m constantly in touch with; most are in media…Even when I was working (a retail job)… I was constantly networking, marketing yourself…”

Frank said, “The limit (on networking) does not exist. You don’t sit down behind LinkedIn and say today I’m going to network… Sometimes I forgot I was doing it, being sometimes forward, ‘you don’t know me, you work for a company I’d like to work for. Can I meet you for coffee?’ In combination, digital and in-person events, through the (City) Ad Club, I leveraged LinkedIn significantly.”

Two of the participants talked about purposeful networking they tracked and organized. Cara said, “My last semester, my goal was to do an informational interview once a week. I kept a spreadsheet of who was helping, meeting people on LinkedIn. It was amazing how many people were willing to help…” Scott said, “From my freshman year of college, I’m going to be a news producer and what I did was meet all the news producers I could, news directors, assistant news directors and build my contact list.”

Participants described close ties and wide networks. All of the participants described their networks in two basic tiers: a smaller group of close ties and a much wider group of connections they could access easily for assistance. Participants believe that strong and weak ties played a role in their successful job search.
Frank said, “The people that are my mentors, I have an incredibly strong connection with, but my day to day network is about ten people. People in my life, I have regular communication with them, is beyond that network (of ten). I don’t call them all the time. I might message them.” Lisa said, “It’s large (my network). But, thinking about who I keep in touch with the most, it’s smaller; it’s a closer-knit group of people. I can shoot them an email: 20 to 25 people; on LinkedIn, 450.

Cara said, “I would say it’s very large (my network). I could probably put together a list of 75 people that I know that could help me between professors, P.R. people, people I’ve worked with through internships. It’s pretty vast. Anita said, “I would say it’s pretty large…I’ve always been a proponent of meeting anyone I can…I have strong ties because, when you do organizations like that…you find your best friends, they are willing to stick their neck out for you.”

**Summary of Major Themes**

In-depth interviews of 11 recent alumni of a, urban, public media and communication college revealed several common themes threading through their stories of how they successfully found a job in their field of study within three months of graduation. Despite differences in major, gender, or race, all study participants shared similar characteristics, attributes, and strategies that helped them become a super graduate.

The first theme that became apparent relates to how highly motivated the participants were throughout college, both academically and in their experiential activities outside of the classroom. They described themselves in positive, optimistic terms, and they expected a lot from themselves. They chose career paths fairly early and
took action to achieve career goals. Some spoke of actively seeking feedback to improve. All participants were involved in career-related activities or organizations, and all but one had at least two internships. Through their activities and internships, they learned how to interview and network, and use proper ways to prepare and follow-up. All believe they did fairly well in classes, especially those courses related to their major. These super graduates appeared pro-active by nature and pushed themselves.

The second theme that emerged was the participants’ ability to find mentors to help them on their career journey. These super graduates sought out and developed relationships with professors, fellow students, and professionals who could guide them and advise them about how to achieve their career goals. These relationships were valued and perceived as critically important to their success in gaining knowledge, experience, and ultimately finding a job in their field of study. The one participant who was a first-generation college student expressed feeling that mentors were even more essential to her support system.

The third and overarching theme was the impact of networking and the social capital each participant built throughout college with fellow students, alumni, and mentors. All participants were aware that networking was important and worked on it: some of them intensely and with a tracking plan. Networking online, particularly on LinkedIn, was also part of the toolbox they used to connect with people or employers they wanted to meet. Eventually, they were able to leverage relationships and connections into opportunities that offered them full-time jobs.
Chapter 5: Discussion/Conclusions

This chapter focuses on the implications of the findings and discusses how they relate to the four research questions. The results are related to the literature review and the theoretical framework of social capital. Implications are addressed, followed by limitations of the study. Finally, the chapter ends with the conclusion of the study.

RQ1: What Characteristics of the Media and Communication Graduate Result in a Successful Job Search Outcome Leading to a Full-Time Job?

The participants’ favorable descriptions of themselves in addition to their involvement in activities, internships, and their above-average academic records indicate these super graduates have pro-active personalities. Brown et al. (2006) defined a pro-active personality as someone with a “tendency to take personal initiative across a range of activities and situations (p. 717).” Their research showed that graduates with pro-active personalities have more success with their job searches. This study soundly supports that literature. It is apparent that the study participants drove themselves to gain as much experience as possible while in school, placed themselves into networking situations, and initiated relationships that would benefit their careers.

Graduates describing themselves with adjectives like go-getter or someone with personality and perseverance also expressed having positive self-esteem. This finding supports the work of Saks and Ashforth (2000), who demonstrated that job seekers with high self-esteem were more likely to receive job offers in a short amount of time. Study participants who had some self-doubts or nervousness about getting a job or interviewing expressed the desire and motivation to push through. A certain amount of determination
may also be at play; they put pressure on themselves to succeed. Whether they were motivated by the desire to please “grandpop” with a byline in a newspaper or only the determination to have a job immediately out of college, these graduates had the self-esteem necessary to make them self-starters.

The participants approached their job searches with confidence in their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Moreover, they had the hard and soft skills that media and communication employers desire, as reported by Cooper & Tang (2010) and Wenger et al.’s (2018) research. These super graduates could demonstrate knowledge and experience they attained in and outside the classroom. Furthermore, they knew how to produce a show, write, shoot and edit a story, write a press release, or create a marketing campaign. The participants also had experience with quality internships, interviewing skills, and the experience that Kwok et al. (2012) identified as important for college seniors in the hospitality field to receive a job offer. This study indicates these equivalent qualities help media and communication graduates as well.

Several participants also had the student-run agency experience that Bush et al. (2016) demonstrated helped public relations and advertising students get hired. In short, these super graduates came into the job search with confidence in their resumes, and the experience the literature illustrates is attractive to employers.

While some participants admitted they become nervous during interviews, by the time they were seeking full-time jobs, they had some experience with calming their nerves or how to “be themselves.” It is unlikely they were viewed as having job interview anxiety (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004) or as networking uncomfort (Wanberg et al., 2000).
RQ2: What Characteristics of the Job Search are Used That Result in a Successful Outcome Leading to a Full-Time Job?

Almost all participants relied on interviewing experience they had practiced during college to benefit them in their job search. Most described a preparation ritual of researching before interviews and knew the importance of following up with thank you notes. Three participants were so well known to the employers who hired them that they reported being offered their jobs without a formal interview.

One surprise finding was the significant role mentors appeared to play in supporting the job search of super graduates. Participants shared many stories of professors and professionals who not only coached and encouraged them but also were perceived to have created opportunities, recommendations, or found positions for the students in whom they believed. Directly or indirectly, the participants thought their mentors were on the journey with them and facilitated them finding their first full-time job. In several instances, mentors played a significant role in introducing participants to “the right person” or enabling them to attend a conference or career event that resulted in a full-time job. While past research and literature supports the importance of mentors in helping students prepare for a job search, more research should be done on the role mentors have in connecting graduates with their first jobs.

Participants agreed on the job search strategy that was least effective: applying to a company where they did not know anyone. If they felt highly qualified for a position, participants seemed to be “hurt” or “surprised” that their resume did not receive a response through a job site or organization. They admitted that in those instances, they did not have a network connection there.
It is not surprising that this study’s findings add more evidence to the literature: it is “who you know.” Every participant used their networks and networking skills to gain a full-time job. Despite the changes in media and communication, this study supports the notion that “your network is your net worth.” The cliquey “resistance to outsiders” mentality in the media and communication industry still exists. The value of connections and recommendations documented by Becker et al. (1993) appears to remain the same in 2019.

Participants mentioned LinkedIn as a valuable job searching, networking, or research tool. One participant learned of a job opportunity at a television station and connected with alumni there before she applied, which helped her obtain an interview and a job. Another participant found a position she wanted on LinkedIn and reached out to the hiring manager first before applying, which started a conversation. She used her networking skills to make it a warm application instead of applying cold without a contact. These results add to the research by Sonja Utz (2016) and show the value in knowing how to use LinkedIn in a job search (Peterson & Dover, 2014).

Van Hoye’s (2017) research suggested that a job search should include a multi-dimensional tactic. While participants experienced that multi-dimensional aspect while applying to jobs online and talking to friends, professors, and mentors, they were quickly rewarded with jobs by leveraging their networks or networking skills.

This study adds further evidence to Neidorf’s (2008) research on graduates of journalism schools: those with internships and connections are successful in getting jobs. All but one of the super graduates had more than one internship, and all described an extensive supportive network, including close ties.
RQ3 What is the Role of Social Capital in the Job Search Process Leading to a Full-Time Job?

The role of social capital was crucial in helping media and communication graduates find jobs shortly after graduation. Coleman (1988) defined social capital as the benefit of allowing people in a community to access resources they otherwise would not have in their network. Through mentors, professors, professionals, alumni, fellow students, family, friends, activities, and internships, super graduates create that benefit for themselves. Participants amassed enough social capital during their college years to propel them into their careers quickly.

In three cases, the graduate’s relationships to their university and college of media and communication played a direct role in accessing a full-time job opportunity. A chance meeting with an alumnus at a party and former classmates’ recommendations opened doors to full-time positions for two of the participants. In seven instances, mentors were directly involved in hiring or creating a situation for their mentee to be hired. Study participants shared these stories in their interviews. One professional mentor flew the graduate to an important national conference where she was recruited. One professor mentor took her small class to an advertising career fair where one of the participants made contact with her future employer. Three other participants were hired where they had interned and had mentors who believed in them. One graduate got her job on the recommendation of her mentor from a prior internship. Another got his job through mentors at an internship introducing him to another company.

Renn et al.’s (2014) study concluded that mentoring gives college graduates more confidence in their job search. This small study suggests that mentors can do far more in
creating social capital by providing access to resources and opportunities that otherwise might be out of reach. These relationships built in class or internships or through campus media or activities seem critical to super graduates. Even participants who did not get a job directly through a mentor’s intervention had other opportunities in college created through mentors, e.g., a mother in the marketing field called a friend in the business, a professor coached the participant for an interview, a professional mentor pushed their mentee to apply for an internship. Consequently, the role of mentors helped to build social capital leading to full-time jobs.

Participants who were in organizations, such as Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), University Television, and Ad Club may have also gained social capital for being a member of those organizations. Graduates believed their application carried more weight in circumstances where alumni, who had been in the same club or organization, were in a position to recommend them.

Economic background did not appear to be a factor that helped participants get a job. None of the participants felt they came from circumstances that were privileged or placed them in a special class or club. As opposed to social capital, economic background appears to have been more of a motivator for super graduates to support themselves as soon as possible. Most seemed anxious to get jobs so they could pay off loans. Three participants revealed they had family members who knew some people “in the business.” Those relationships might have initially offered social capital to gain access to an internship or a mentor.
RQ4: What are the Roles of Networking and Strong vs. Weak Ties in Relationships in the Job Search Process Leading to a Full-Time Job?

As discussed, connections made through networking were the primary method graduates in this study learned of jobs and found jobs in media and communication within three months of graduation. The study revealed that the participants had a mix of strong ties and weak ties that led to a successful job search.

Four of the participants had what Granovetter (1973) might have called weak tie connections to the job they ultimately accepted. A weak tie is someone who is only seen occasionally or introduced through one’s extended network, e.g., connections made at a party, a college career fair, a networking event, or a convention. These are opportunities where someone learns of a job through a person they did not know well or not as well as family or friends. Granovetter showed that weak ties are people outside the tightest circle of a job seeker’s connections yet may be an important source of valuable job information. A strong tie, like the participant’s mother in marketing who helped her daughter make an industry connection, can result in a mentorship or internship. However, the job the participant found came through a weak tie she had found herself and developed on LinkedIn.

Nevertheless, within this study, this researcher would argue several other opportunities came through the strong tie of mentors or friends who did know the participant well but advocated for them anyway: a mentor at a prior internship, a mentor who hired the participant directly, alumni friends who informed the participant of a job before it was posted, a former supervisor recommendation to a professional friend. While they might not have been in a participant’s closest small tier of friends, it would also be
difficult to classify them as weak ties. They were coaches and advocates for the job seeker.

Several participants filled jobs before they were posted, which gives more credibility to the research Granovetter did in 1995 about job opportunities not being communicated through formal sources. Some super graduates in this study had an inside track through their network of close ties and an extended network described as large. With connections and networks being maintained through social media, perhaps the line between weak and strong ties is somewhat murky. Participants in the study believed the mentors they stayed connected with through emails or social media were strong ties built on a relationship like family or friends.

Participants spoke about consciously spending time networking during their college years through organizations, internships, classes, and special career events. They were aware of the importance of knowing people in the business, even if, as one participant said, it happened “organically.”

Super graduates were not taking any risks: they made connections wherever they could. They created strong relationships with mentors in their profession and the college of media and communication. It is probably safe to say, if the connection that got them the job had not succeeded, their network was substantial and broad enough to produce other opportunities. In fact, three of the graduates reported having additional job offers to choose from within three months of graduation.
Implications

The National Association of Colleges and Employers reported 66.6% of graduates surveyed in 2017 with Bachelor degrees in Communications, Journalism, and related programs, found full time employment within six months (National Association of Colleges and Employers (2018). The percentage is lower when looking at data for media and communication graduates with full time jobs related to field of study. Accordingly, the researcher undertook this study to see if there was something to be learned from super graduates who found full-time jobs in their field of study within three months. Some of what was learned in this study could help shorten the job search for future media and communication students and bring them better opportunities in their field. It demonstrated what the super graduates did in college and what they did during their job searches that made a difference. What was learned through this research could be taught to media and communication students through curriculum, career development classes, and workshops to help them better prepare for the marketplace.

The results of the study are apparent: having a job in media and communication within three months of graduation requires a great deal of work, commitment, and energy long before the job search begins. The experiences of the participants would suggest the following goals for media and communication undergraduates:

- Determine a career path no later than junior year. Earlier is best.
- Maintain good grades.
- Become involved in campus media or professional organizations as soon as possible.
- Acquire at least one internship, but several internships are better.
• Find mentors. Build relationships with your professors, professionals, alumni, and fellow students in your field who can advise and guide you.

• Learn to network and do it often. Take advantage of events and opportunities to meet professionals and maintain those connections.

• Learn how to use LinkedIn to research, find jobs, and connect with professionals.

• Learn to interview well. Practice, research, follow-up with thank you notes.

• Gain as much experience in your field as possible.

• Learn soft skills and hard skills desired in your industry.

• Work on building confidence and self-esteem by gaining as much knowledge and experience as possible.

• Foster positivity and perseverance.

This study reinforces the idea that media and communication students must be informed early about the extra activities, internships, networking opportunities, and mentors that should be sought out during their time in college; an “investment in the bank” to pay off with a future job within months of graduation. In addition, they should be gaining as much knowledge as possible in classes and working on both hard and soft skills that will make them competitive in their job search.

More time should be spent teaching students how to get “networking comfortable” and how to find and develop mentor relationships. Students should be encouraged to become acquainted with their professors and take advantage of professor
office hours. All students must have a good grasp of how to use LinkedIn, be encouraged to create profiles, and build connections throughout college.

Limitations of the Study

The convenience sample of 11 media and communication graduates was limited in size and scope. While the researcher attempted to include racially diverse students and represent five media and communication majors, the study was not comprehensive enough to make any conclusions based on those factors. For this study, it appears that those differentiators did not impact the shared similarities of the participants’ character, attributes, activities, and successful job search strategies.

The study is far too small to be generalizable, to make sweeping claims, or to represent all May 2018 graduates of media and communication colleges who found jobs within three months of graduation. It also does not provide understanding or insight into the journey of other graduates who may have found jobs within their field without the full resumes and attributes of the 11 participants. This study was also dependent on the recollections of the participants’ academic and career activities. Participants who agreed to be a part of this study had similar attributes, characteristics, strategies, and experiences that would add to and support past literature and larger studies on successful job searches of new college graduates.

Conclusion

At a time when the cost of a college education and college debt continues to rise, and the stability of some jobs in media and communication is questioned, there is a need to find strategies that will help students prepare for a successful and shorter job search. Parents and families investing in college are seeking a return on investment.
This study of 11 super graduates found evidence that there are common attributes, experiences, and strategies that contribute to finding a job in media and communication within three months of graduation. Study participants shared optimistic attitudes and good self-esteem along with well-rounded resumes of internships and involvement in professional organizations. They were able to focus and commit to a career path no later than their junior year. In addition, interviews revealed that these super graduates believe relationships with mentors through classes or professional activities influenced their successful job search. Participants actively learned to network and sought networking opportunities while gaining knowledge and skills that were competitive in the job market and attractive to employers.

By the time these participants were graduating, they could rely on a network of friends, mentors, and professional connections familiar with their impressive resumes, allowing them to quickly find a full-time job in their field—faster than 50% of other graduates in their class. In the competitive field of media and communication, students should be educated and supported in gaining a similar breadth of experience, internships, knowledge, and networking that may help ensure their degree compensates them before their loans are due.
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Appendix

RQ1: What characteristics of the graduate resulted in a successful job-search outcome leading to a full-time job?

Thinking about your own personal qualities and characteristics can you tell me about attributes you believe assisted you in preparing for your career? Your job searches?

How would you describe your level of self-esteem, initiative and self-motivation as it relates to your career and job search?

How would you describe any nervousness, stress or worry about finding a job?

How would you describe your confidence in knowledge and skills acquired in college related to your job search?

How would you describe personality traits as they relate to your job search? Confident? Shy? Reserved? Outgoing?

How did you feel about your dress, social etiquette (i.e., handshake) and appearance during interviews?

RQ2: What characteristics of the job search were used that resulted in a successful outcome leading to a full-time job?

Thinking about your college experience, tell me what helped you prepare for your career? Your job searches?
How important would you say your GPA was? Your degree? Knowledge gained in classes?

Thinking about the activities you participated in outside of the classroom during college, tell me which were most important in preparing you for your career and job search and why? Internships? Organizations? Jobs? Career coaching? Workshops? Career fairs and events? Explain.

During your college years, how did certain people (if any) inspire, motivate, or mentor you in a way that helped you prepare for your career and/or job search and career?

How would you describe your confidence or lack of confidence in job interviews? How would you describe your preparation for job interviews?

How would you describe your interaction with potential employers after job interviews? Follow ups?

How would you rate your job search outcomes? Would you say they were highly effectively, less effective? Can you give an example of this?

Looking back on your job searches, tell me about the ones that were most successful and why?

Looking back on your job search, tell me about the ones that you believe were least successful? Why?
RQ3: What was the role of social capital (e.g., education, credentials, experiences via internships) in the job search process leading to a full-time job?


RQ4: What was the role of networking and strong vs. weak ties in relationships in the job search process leading to a full-time job?

Thinking about your job search behaviors, tell me about how you approached this? For example, how much of your approach was spent:

Talking with friends about possible job leads?

Talking with professors about possible job leads?

Talking with people in your social network about possible job leads?

Reading help wanted ads in newspapers? Postings online? Jobsites?

Anything else?

How important, if at all, would you say your social network was in landing your full-time job?

If you had to quantify your social network, how large would you say it is? As large as other people’s you know, not as large?

How much time would you say you spent on networking behaviors? Can you describe networking behaviors that led to your full-time job?

How would you describe the social ties in your network? Example: Would you say they were strong, moderately strong, not strong?
Can you tell me about the characteristics of the people you contacted as part of your social network? Where these individuals within higher education, what were their occupations?