

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications, College of Journalism & Mass
Communications

Journalism and Mass Communications, College of

8-2005

Are advanced degrees worth the time and effort?

Carla Kimbrough

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, ckimbrough2@Unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/journalismfacpub>



Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#)

Kimbrough, Carla, "Are advanced degrees worth the time and effort?" (2005). *Faculty Publications, College of Journalism & Mass Communications*. 27.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/journalismfacpub/27>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journalism and Mass Communications, College of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications, College of Journalism & Mass Communications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.



MASTERING THE ART
CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Are advanced degrees worth the time and effort?

We've read it all before. The more you learn, the more you earn. High school graduates earn more than those who drop out of school. College grads have higher salaries than those who have only a high school education. Those with graduate degrees often out-earn those with a bachelor's degree. Of course, there are exceptions to every rule.

The question of graduate degrees often comes up in our industry. When I've spoken with journalists who are pondering graduate school, I ask about their motivation. What do you want the outcome to be? What do you think a graduate degree will give you?

My own decision to go to graduate school was, well, easy and not so easy.

The reasons to go: I always wanted to have a graduate degree. I wanted to be able to pursue teaching at a collegiate level at some point in the future. I wanted more training. I wanted to be in the room making decisions that were reflected in the next day's newspaper.

The reason not to go: the money! Heck, I was a full-time reporter and hating to pay off the little loans I did have. I didn't want to add to that burden.

I discussed my dilemma with more than a few people. Many understood my resistance to debt. But two comments changed my perspective and stand out most in my mind, even to this day:

"Education is something no one can ever take from you"

"You think education is expensive, try ignorance."

Those thoughts were hardly original, but they stuck like glue and struck a chord with what rang true for what I envisioned for my future.

I went to graduate school, took out some student loans and paid them all back. I

accomplished my personal goal of having an advanced degree. I taught at the collegiate level. I received more specialized training. And, I made it into the room where the decisions were reflected in the next day's newspaper.

Personal missions accomplished.

Even though I earned a master's degree, I don't think you have to have one to succeed. There are countless journalists who are doing quite well with a bachelor's degree and a good number without a specific focus in journalism.

Here are a few good reasons, in my humble opinion, to return for a graduate degree in journalism:

- You missed the opportunity for internships as an undergraduate. You've learned finding a job is tough without experience. So, you return to get another crack at internships to gain some experience and hope for a better job market.

- You didn't major in journalism as an undergraduate and now you want a firm grounding in the basics skills and principles.

- You want some experiences, life or academic, that you've never had. You choose schools that have programs that will help you get the experience you desire. Maybe it's computer-assisted reporting. Maybe it's reporting internationally or learning another language. Maybe it's some strong research skills.

Unlike other career fields, having a graduate degree does not guarantee you more money, more promotions, or a bigger market. It's a gamble. I repeat: There are no guarantees.

Editors still remain most concerned about having someone who can put together a sentence or edit one, who can sniff out a good story and get it first and accurately and who knows how to play nice in the sandbox. That also goes for writing super headlines, taking great photos and designing eye-catching pages.

But, one thing I know for sure: The learning is never over; at least it shouldn't be. When you stop learning, you stop living.

As working journalists, time is always a challenge. But, there are ways to keep learning.

This industry offers numerous professional organizations that provide training opportunities. You can find programs about health care, religion, social security, computer-assisted reporting, editing, photography, online journalism, whatever your heart's desire.

Then, there are annual and regional conferences that provide training through workshops with seasoned journalists as presenters. SPJ is among them. For the specialists, look into the Society of Environmental Journalists, American Copy Editors Society or the Women in Photojournalism Conference. Use your journalistic skills to sniff out these training opportunities.

If you yearn for the good ol' days in the classroom, take a class or two at college. Your employer might offer a tuition reimbursement plan, if you can show the relevance to your job or future job. If you don't want to go for a graduate degree, many colleges offer certificate programs. Some programs allow you to apply those credit hours to a graduate degree, if you decide you want the extra degree after all.

Then, if you've learned all you want to learn and earned all you want to earn, why not give back to a nearby college. Many would welcome working journalists to share the knowledge that they have gained from doing journalism every day. Teaching is an investment in the future of this industry and don't we need it!

Whatever you decide to do, learning or teaching, remember that learning is truly living. Education in whatever its form is never a waste.

Carla Kimbrough-Robinson has spent nearly 20 years in newsrooms and is a trained life coach with Inspire Higher International, LLC, a Denver-based personal development company. Send her questions at coaching@inspirehigher.net



**CARLA
KIMBROUGH-
ROBINSON**