



Professional Profiles

Spring 2015



Featuring eleven alumni of the UNCP Department of Mass Communication



Notes on Contributors

Professional Profiles was reported and written during spring 2015 by students in JRN 4600—Investigative Journalism:

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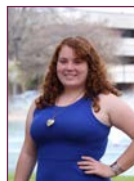
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Jasmin Jenkins is a senior journalism major at UNCP. She is the advertising manager for *The Pine Needle* student newspaper. Upon graduation in May 2015, she plans to begin her career in news while attending online graduate school at Regent University.



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Breyonia Moore was born in Laurinburg, North Carolina, and graduated from Scotland High School's Visual and Performing Arts program in 2009. Upon graduation she plans to move north to seek employment in fashion or urban music publication industries.



Sara Owen is a senior at UNCP majoring in mass communication with a concentration in journalism. She is Managing Editor at *The Pine Needle* student newspaper and an intern at *ARRAY* magazine. Her dream is to be a successful writer and photographer.



Cody Allen Parker was born and raised in Laurinburg, North Carolina where he continues to live. He has always had a love of sports and is studying journalism at UNCP in the hopes of becoming a sports writer.



Marian (Elise) Quidley is from the Outer Banks of North Carolina and will be graduating from UNCP in May 2015. She is a journalism major who hopes to work either as a news reporter or in the fashion magazine industry.



Zhuxuan Yan is an international student from Shanghai, China. She is a senior majoring in mass communication with a concentration in journalism. She worked for *The Pine Needle* in 2014 as a staff writer.



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Life Through a Lens

By Janae Curtain



CURTIS ADAMS

**Videographer and
Editor
ABC 11 News
Class of 2011
Broadcasting**

“It was only just two years of broadcasting that got me where I am today.”

Gathering his thoughts over the phone, Curtis Adams describes the challenges he faced entering college and is thankful that he was able to remain motivated despite the obstacles he faced.

“At the time, I had no idea I would even do good in college. I just went because I had nowhere else to go,” he said. Adams graduated from the mass communication program in 2011 with an emphasis in broadcasting. He admits that it took him a while to find his direction.

Born on October 21, 1988, in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, Adams was a military baby who lived in many different places until ending up in Raleigh, North Carolina, at the age of seven.

“My dad was in the military, so I’m from all over the place,” he said.

He graduated from Southeast Raleigh High School in 2007 with no interest in attending college.

“I played football, got a big head, and I didn’t have good grades,” he said.

Adams received an acceptance letter from UNCP, so he reluctantly decided to check it out. “It was either go to UNCP or go to the military. My dad didn’t want me going into the military,” he said.

Even after being accepted into UNCP, Adams had to retake English and math classes

because of how poor his grades were in high school.

“I was actually a business major. I was in business because I had my own company. I would make highlights for athletes using Final Cut, you know, and I would make a lot of money. So I created a business and I was like well, maybe I should go into business,” he said.

After taking some business classes, he realized the department wasn’t for him. Since he was already working in video content creation, he decided to check out the broadcasting track in the mass communication program.

“Why am I doing this when broadcasting is right across the campus?” he asked himself.

At the start of his junior year, Adams tried some broadcasting courses. Two years later,



Curtis Adams editing video (opposite page) and in a remote production vehicle (above)

he graduated with honors and was named broadcasting graduate of the year at the department's annual awards banquet.

Since departing UNCP, Adams has worked at a number of agencies including News 14, Fox Charlotte, UNC Athletics, and the Carolina Panthers.

Currently, he works as a videographer and editor in electronic news gathering (ENG) at ABC 11 News.

Adams attributes the multiple skills that he learned at UNCP to his success in the field.

"Once you graduate, you'll see that everything becomes consolidated to where people who don't have multiple skills are getting laid off," he said.

Adams strongly believes that the broadcasting skills he obtained at UNCP molded him into the person he is today. Although it

took him some time to transition after college and get to his current position, he's ultimately glad he chose UNCP.

"It was only just two years of broadcasting that got me where I am today," he said.

He stresses the fact that as a recent graduate, nothing will come easy and there will be many ups and downs for any communications professional coming out of a bachelor's program. Adams believes that the key is drive and determination.

"You never know how long it's going to take you but it's going to happen. You just have to be patient. As long as you keep working hard, it will happen. Trust me," he said. 🌀

A Thought:

You never know how long it's going to take you but it's going to happen.

Celebrity Hobby Leads to Star-filled Career

By Mónica Espitia



WADE ALLEN

Lifestyle Reporter
Gaston Gazette and the
Shelby Star
 Class of 2010
 Broadcasting/
 Journalism

“In my personal life I have met about anybody you could imagine.”

When he was 16, Wade Allen sent a fan letter to television actress Mary Tyler Moore asking for her autograph. To Allen’s surprise, the actress not only responded with an autograph, she sent a personalized letter thanking him for being her fan. The letter ignited his favorite hobby, collecting celebrity memorabilia. Allen has received so many letters from celebrities that he stopped counting when he hit the 10,000 mark in 2010. Although he has no idea how many letters he owns today, he receives an estimate of nearly

20 letters a week. “In my personal life I have met about anybody you could imagine because I travel on the weekends. Sometimes I just go around here and sometimes I go far away to get autographs,” he said. “The farthest I have been is Los Angeles.”

Allen’s close connection with the world of celebrities is not only a hobby that he pursues during his free time; it is also reflective of his work as a lifestyle reporter for the *Gaston Gazette* and the *Shelby Star*, two newspapers that circulate in the Charlotte, North Carolina, area.

“My passion is the entertainment-related stuff. That is what I always wanted to do. I am lucky I get to do what I want to do, and I am still young,” he said.

On top of having met many Hollywood and sports celebrities like Hayden Panettiere, Selena Gomez and Danny White, the report-

er from Rutherfordton, North Carolina, has also encountered plenty of remarkable people through his job. For example, he has interviewed former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, *Dallas* star Linda Gray and Broadway legend Chita Rivera.

Allen’s love for entertainment has not only allowed him to meet hundreds of celebrities in person, but it has also made him feel quite famous on occasion. “This lady, she approached me at a Chick fil-A. I was sitting there alone and she was ecstatic, she was so happy, nearly in tears, because she wanted to meet me and she wanted a selfie with me. She was just so sweet,” Allen said. “I remember I thought ‘Wow! This is incredible.’”

The 27-year-old journalist said the recognition he now receives from his readers in Charlotte required a lot of time and hard work. When he graduated from the Universi-



Wade Allen posing with Hayden Panettiere (opposite page) and with the late Joan Rivers (above)

ty of North Carolina at Pembroke as a double major in broadcasting and journalism in May 2010, it took him over six months to land his first job as a crime reporter at the *Gaston Gazette*. The first three years of his career were not easy, he said. He had to work from night to night and usually during the weekend “in case something happened.”

In 2013, Allen became the education reporter at the same newspaper. After writing stories about school meetings and Charlotte colleges and universities for a year, Allen’s dream to work as an entertainment writer became a reality in August 2014.

“I am exactly where I want to be at the moment. I am living in North Carolina, the state where I was born, and Charlotte has so much to offer,” he said. “I really enjoy it here. I really like my job, I love my life, I get to do some incredible things and thanks to my job

I get to do what I love with my personal life which is travel on the weekends.”

Although the former editor-in-chief of *The Pine Needle* said he feels satisfied with the great path that his career has taken in only five years, he also said in the future he would love to move to Los Angeles because that is “the entertainment capital of the world.”

“I guess if I had to think of my dream job it would be writing for an entertainment magazine like *People Magazine* or doing red carpet reporting for TV shows like Entertainment Tonight or Extra.”

A Thought:

I am exactly where I want to be at the moment.

Decades Later: A Public Relations Executive

By Cody Parker and Zhuxuan Yan



JIMMY AUTRY

**Senior Vice President
of Member and Com-
munity Relations
Flint Energies
Class of 1977
Journalism**

“Pembroke expanded the world in ways I had never seen.”

In 1977 when Jimmy Autry graduated from Pembroke with a degree in journalism, the university was called Pembroke State University. Since that time he has gone on to become the Senior Vice President of Member and Community Relations at Flint Energies. Flint is a major energy provider with about 87,000 customers. Autry oversees a department of around 60 people. “Pembroke expanded the world in ways I had never seen,” Autry said.

His experience in the mass communication program helped prepare

Autry for his career and led the self-proclaimed “country boy” to become a successful company executive. The position gives him a lot of opportunities to travel and pass on his knowledge to new generations in the public relations field. He has been to 49 out of the 50 states, with Alaska being the only state he has yet to visit. He hopes to check that off of his list in the near future.

Autry began his career as a mathematics major but switched to journalism when he realized that he found writing news stories to be more engaging than crunching numbers.

Autry joined *The Pine Needle* and became the paper’s editor during his senior year. He enjoyed writing for the newspaper, doing research, and conducting interviews. He was especially drawn to constantly meeting and interviewing new people, as well as the thrill of the fast pace of newspaper production. His

position as editor was a great precursor for his eventual role as a corporate leader. During his time as editor, he had a staff of 16 working with him and did most of the photography for coverage of campus events. “Learning new stuff all the time makes for a good day,” Autry said.

His love of sports was developed around 11 years old. He especially loved baseball, but admits that he wasn’t very good at it. “I was the kid who was put in the bottom of the sixth inning in right field, and they hoped nothing would get hit to me,” Autry said.

Despite a lack of natural athletic abilities, coaches noticed Autry’s love for the sport. A grade school baseball coach taught him how to keep the scorebook by the time he was 12 years old. Over time, that hobby would lead him to multiple professional positions, including the Sports Information Director at



Jimmy Autry receiving an award for his work in PR

UNCP and the Sports Editor for *The Robesonian* daily newspaper.

As many journalists do, Autry would later shift into the field of public relations, where he would manage his company's relations with media entities to better predict and control how messages are distributed by mass media. Autry's love for practicing public relations has given him 33 successful years in the electric utility industry. During this time, he has won multiple awards for his work.

Autry is actively involved in the Public Relations Society of America; a group of PR practitioners with over 21,000 members across the nation. In 2006, he was voted into the College of Fellows, which is an elite group of around 400 people within PRSA. The credential gives Autry the opportunity to speak and teach students in the field.

In 2008, he returned to his alma mater to

speak to PRSSA members about his work and career. He was surprised at how much the university had changed since his time as an undergraduate. The name of the university had changed, new buildings had been erected, and there was a football stadium where he remembered a parking lot. Autry admits he almost got lost on campus. "But I'm glad to see the university is growing," he said.

Autry currently lives in Kathleen, Georgia, and is planning to retire in the near future to move closer to his two granddaughters.

"Retirement is only a transition time. It's not an end of anything. It's a move on to something else," he said. Autry is looking forward to the conclusion of an amazing career which began as a seed decades ago in the Department of Mass Communication at UNCP. 🌱

A Thought:

I have been blessed to have a great position where every day is a learning experience.

Emmy Winner Finds Happiness at Fox Sports

By Sara Owen



JACKIE BOWER

Feature Producer

Fox Sports

Class of 2006

Broadcasting/ Public
Relations

“I’ve learned ... that every network has a different way of doing things and ... if you work at the same place you won’t be very versatile.”

Jackie Bower, a 2006 graduate of UNCP’s mass communication program, found her home in the field of sports broadcasting. She is now a Feature Producer at Fox Sports in California and is happier than ever. “I love it,” Bower said.

While attending UNCP, Bower studied public relations and broadcasting and was an active member in the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA). Unsure of her career goals early in college, she took an introductory mass communication course and soon afterward declared it as a major. “It wasn’t a difficult decision for me to make,” she said.

During her senior year at UNCP, ESPN recruiters visited the campus. She said her professor “made” her go talk to them. Bower originally turned down ESPN because she wanted to work in the film industry. After that didn’t work out, she contacted ESPN shortly after graduation and landed a job with them that would last for six years.

Preparing for her interview required her to do research to pass their sports test. She jokes that she thinks they gave her the job be-

cause they “felt bad” for her.

Working at ESPN required her to live in Connecticut. While she enjoyed the job, she was not very keen on the location, adding that it was “in the middle of nowhere.” Desiring different surroundings, she continued searching the job market and ended up at Fox Sports. “I’ve learned from leaving ESPN that every network has a different way of doing things and people do TV very different and if you work at the same place you won’t be very versatile,” she said.

Bower won an Emmy for her coverage of the 2010 World Cup in Africa. “I’ve done two World Cups and three Super Bowls,” she said. Travel is her favorite part of her job. She also likes that her job isn’t in an office. “There’s no way you can get bored doing what I do,” she said.

As a feature producer she stays behind the



scenes and interacts with PR teams, agents and athletes. Time for these interactions is limited and requires substantial preparation. Most athletes would talk all day about themselves if their PR agents would let them, but their agents are very strict with time. Her crew often only gets to record talent for 10-15 minutes and then that footage must be condensed for TV. Segments are usually only about two minutes long.

She said she often has to tell new producers to reduce their list of questions because the time passes so quickly during interviews. In her field there is always a time crunch.

Bower is a Panthers football fan and has interviewed Cam Newton twice. She meets a lot of professional athletes, but she sees it as just part of the job. “I’ve been doing this for eight years now. It’s kind of hard to get star struck,” she said. “I don’t think you really

get star struck unless you grew up watching somebody... News is a whole different animal, especially sports news. It’s like working in a bull pen with all those guys. It’s a locker room,” she said. “I’ve spent eight years working in a locker room.”

She says working in sports is not for everyone and that women who want to work in the field have to develop a “thick skin” because it is “a man’s club.” “You can’t be faint of heart to work in sports news,” she said.

Since graduating from UNCP, Bower went on to complete a Master’s Degree in Organizational Communication at Marist College in New York. ESPN, like many companies, has an education reimbursement program. Jackie Bower’s education has led her to a career she would never have imagined prior to joining the mass communication program at UNCP. 🌀

A Thought:

I’m a little too smart to let someone else be my producer.

Springboard to Career and Contentment

By Sara Owen and Jasmin Jenkins



ELLEN COOPER

Marketing Specialist
First Health of the
Carolinas
Class of 2012
Public Relations

“You always have room to grow.”

While attending UNCP, Ellen Cooper, a public relations major, completed two internships at First Health of the Carolinas in Pinehurst, North Carolina. The Department of Mass Communication requires internships for all of its majors. In Ellen’s case, it paid off particularly well. First Health was so impressed with her that they hired her into a full-time position. Ultimately, the organization created a position specifically for her. Ellen is now the Marketing Specialist for First Health. “I got to help create my position,” Cooper stated.

She credits her studies at UNCP for her job and success. Cooper was active in a number of programs at the university. She participated in research through the Pembroke Undergraduate Research Creativity Center (PURC). Cooper was also an active member of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA). “I thought it was a good learning experience. I love PRSSA,” Cooper said.

Cooper did not start her college career at UNCP. She originally attended East Carolina University for a year and decided it wasn’t for her. Taking some time off from her education, she did make-up for several Broadway performances before finally making the decision to go back to school at UNCP.

Cooper admits her path to success was not always easy but she believes the experience has been worth the final result. Her journey resulted in both job satisfaction and, more im-

portantly, personal discovery. “I’ve changed a lot and accepted a lot about myself, including my strengths and weaknesses,” Cooper stated. “You always have room to grow.” Cooper says that her biggest mistake has been “being impatient.” She says she always wants to “go, go, go.” Her advice is to “be patient” and “be prepared for whatever gets thrown your way.” “You have to take it day by day,” she added.

Outside of work, Cooper is passionate about rescuing animals. She and her husband have provided foster care for dogs, helping them find permanent homes. She also enjoys helping children in her community. For leisure, she enjoys spending time at the beach with her husband.

Happy and content with her place in the world, Cooper says that her preparation in the Department of Mass Communication at UNCP was the springboard for a fulfilling and successful career.

A Hard-Hitting Educator

By Elise Quidley

“UNCP was a really good stepping stone to get me where I wanted to go.”

Since graduating from UNCP’s mass communication program in 2006, Daniel Henry found his calling as a teacher in higher education at The Art Institute of Austin. Henry teaches 15 different classes for the institute. “They are all about the fundamentals of advertising, advertising strategy, sales and public relations,” he said. Henry was a public relations major with a minor in marketing during his time at UNCP.

Ultimately he would find himself in Austin, Texas, with a fulfilling career in higher education. The work he did at UNCP was the foundation for his success. While in college, he participated in PRSSA, was the advertising sales manager for *The Pine Needle*, and was a cameraman for UNCP’s news program, *Carolina News Today*. Henry encourages undergraduate students to do as many internships as possible. “I don’t believe you can have too many internships,” Henry said.

He also stresses that the time to make mistakes is as a student. Taking risks and trying new things is the best way to discover a career path that will lead to personal fulfillment.

“The biggest mistake students make is just float through school and not know what they want to accomplish,” Henry said. He admits that he was one of those lost students who didn’t know what he wanted to do. He was originally a marketing major before switching

to the mass communication department.

“I took some classes in the marketing building but the professors in Old Main actually talked to me,” Henry said. “I knew that’s where I needed to be.”

When not teaching, Henry is a licensed professional boxer who trains for four to five matches a year. His matches have appeared on ESPN and Fox Sports. “My first fight ever was on ESPN,” Henry said. “A lot of my matches are streamed on the Internet, too.”

Henry sees boxing as a confidence builder that keeps him in great shape. “I wanted to be responsible for my own success or failure, unlike team sports,” Henry said.

According to Henry, he owes most of his success to UNCP. “UNCP was a really good stepping stone to get me where I wanted to go,” Henry said. “They molded me into the student I was and gave me the confidence that I have now.”



DANIEL HENRY

Adjunct Instructor
The Art Institute of Austin
Class of 2006
Public Relations

A Drive for Success

By Breyonia Moore



GARRETT LOCKLEAR

Performance Manager
Red Ventures
Class of 2011
Broadcasting / Public
Relations

“I was a nursing major, but I always knew I had a communication instinct. PR was fun and challenging.”

Being a young woman working in a big industry can be challenging, but mass communication graduate Garrett Locklear remains highly driven through it all. Locklear graduated in 2010 with a concentration in broadcasting and a minor in public relations.

Being 50% Native American and 50% Caucasian, Locklear was excited to be part of a diverse, multicultural campus with historic ties to her heritage.

“I was a nursing major, but I always had a communication instinct. PR was fun and challenging,” Locklear said.

As an active athlete on the UNCP Women’s Golf Team, Garrett became a member of the Student Athlete Advisory Committee. The experience inspired her to become more involved in the campus community. By her junior year, she was a member of the Leadership and Service Opportunities Program as well as the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA). “Being involved with the community, especially a largely Native American community, and helping others made me happy,” she said.

Over the next three years, Garrett would decide to further her communications skills as an anchor and reporter on the student-run newscast, *Carolina News Today*. “At the time, I didn’t realize what an advantage I had by be-

ing a part of *Carolina News Today*. I look back and was grateful for that opportunity because it helped me develop skills in verbal and written communication,” she said.

In 2011, Garrett became a media relations intern for the Athletics Department at UNCP. The position required her to apply broadcasting knowledge to sports productions. As a result, she improved her camera skills and her ability to write broadcast scripts. Her duties as an intern included editing sporting events and creating live productions for men’s and women’s basketball, soccer, volleyball and football teams.

Locklear now resides in Charlotte, North Carolina where she works as a Performance Manager at Red Ventures. Founded in 2000 with locations in North and South Charlotte, Red Ventures is a sizeable company that develops sales and marketing campaigns for a



variety of businesses. “The only thing constant at Red Ventures is change. Being able to help others grow in leadership is what I’m most passionate about,” Garrett said.

Red Ventures uses data to optimize and improve the entire customer lifecycle for the partners they brand. The company serves businesses in a variety of industries such as home services, energy, media and insurance.

Locklear works in training and performance management, helping to develop individuals who have the potential to be future leaders in the company. “We might do group trainings, one-on-one coachings, or huddles to enforce best performance initiatives. The atmosphere and culture we’ve been able to build in North Charlotte is dear to my heart,” she said.

Outside of work, Garrett spends time with her friends, enjoying outdoor activities

and watching sporting events. “Sometimes working 24/7 can be challenging; you have to take a break,” she said.

In the near future, she plans to continue working with Red Ventures and figuring out how to become a corporate athlete. “Anyone that aspires to improve in their current role can learn how to be a corporate athlete in the business world. This program is designed to help participants become more productive and effective under pressure through use of groundbreaking Energy Management Technology,” she said.

Garrett Locklear’s studies in the mass communication program at UNCP set the stage for a successful career in corporate America. 🌟

A Thought:

Learning how to mobilize my energy and reset under pressure has truly helped me be more efficient during my day, and I also feel less tired by the end of the day.

Perseverance of an Entertainment Producer

By Cody Parker



VONTI McRAE

Project Coordinator
HBO
Class of 1994
Broadcasting

“You need to learn how to deal with people from all different kinds of backgrounds in order to be successful in a business environment.”

Vonti McRae was born to a New York City police officer in Brooklyn in 1978. Desiring a better life for her children, Vonti’s mother sent her and her identical twin Monti to live with their grandmother in Raeford, North Carolina. Vonti enjoyed living in the South and during

the summers she and Monti would spend nearly every day reading in the local library. Her grandmother didn’t have home air conditioning, so the library had the added benefit of a cool environment.

Vonti moved back to Brooklyn when she was 12 years old but quickly became disillusioned with school because of the poor conditions. School buildings were run down and in a state of disrepair. The culture was extraordinarily negative. Teachers would routinely comment to students to not worry about showing up for class because they were going to get paid anyway.

The environment led a lot of kids to turn to the streets. Vonti walked that path as well. It was a tough time for her. Many people she knew were killed during this time of her life.

“At the time, you don’t even realize the craziness of it. It’s only when you think back

to it because you don’t realize when you’re in the mix of that, that it’s not the norm,” McRae said.

She joined a volunteer organization in New York that helped her better herself.

“It taught me the discipline of where I am now because even though it was a volunteer thing, the director of the program made all of us responsible. If you missed a day, it was literally like you missed a day of work,” McRae said.

Having found a way off of the streets, Vonti recalled the happiness of her youth with her grandmother in Raeford, so she decided to return to the area and attend UNCP. She said that all the volunteer work helped her get into UNCP because she didn’t finish high school with a good GPA.

While on campus she held many different positions: yearbook editor, university mar-



shal, resident advisor, apartment advisor and Model United Nations Debate Team member, among others.

Vonti has fond memories of UNCP and the kindness she received while there. Close to graduation, a scheduling conflict was going to keep her from receiving financial aid for a class she needed. The financial aid office sent her to see a man she had never met before.

“He literally used his own money to help me graduate on time,” McRae sentimentally recalled.

After attending graduate school in San Francisco, she got a job at Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. She was a project manager for their home entertainment releases.

While there, McRae started a “Go Green” Program to sell the company’s excess inventory to recycling companies.

Vonti is now a coordinator in the Project

Management Department at HBO in New York. She manages their product launches from beginning to end and has handled their Emmy Screeners since 2011.

Vonti said that she loved the diversity of UNCP and found it to be helpful in her professional growth. “You need to learn how to deal with people from all different kinds of backgrounds in order to be successful in a business environment,” she said.

College can change lives, and Vonti’s dedication to her studies in mass communication is a testament to the empowerment that comes from a strong education with faculty and staff who foster success. 🌸

A Thought:

Sometimes you just can’t overthink it or you will talk yourself out of doing stuff.

Venezuelan Finds Her Dream of Becoming a Spanish-language Journalist

By Mónica Espitia



MARIA PLANA

Planning Producer
CNN Spanish
Class of 2013
Journalism

“Years from now I want to be the News Director for CNN Spanish. That is my goal.”

After graduating from UNCP as a journalism major in May 2013, Maria Gabriela Plana made a call that would forever change her professional career. She had just moved to Atlanta from Charlotte and was looking for a job in the area. After spending several months without any luck, Plana started contacting colleagues from different Spanish-language newspapers in the area. One of them gave her the name of a person he knew at CNN. Plana called the headquarters of the world-renowned news organization but could not locate

the name she had been given. However, she had the chance to talk to the editorial director of CNN Spanish, who asked for a copy of her résumé. In less than 24 hours she had a job with CNN.

“I think perseverance is very important. I filled out several online applications for CNN but I never heard back. It was hard to get in contact with them, but I didn’t give up and I kept trying other ways to get a job at the place of my dreams. I think that it was thanks to my perseverance that I am where I am today,” she said.

Eleven years before landing a job at CNN, Plana had moved to Charlotte from her homeland, Caracas, Venezuela, to escape the difficult economic, social and political conditions that the South American country still experiences today. The adjustment was not easy for her or her family.

“The transition was huge. It was difficult,” Plana said. “When I got here I was always trying to find Latinos who could understand me, not only because of the language, but also because they could identify with how you feel.”

Though moving to a new country was challenging, this major life change gave Plana the opportunity to meet a retired Colombian journalist who worked as a Spanish teacher at her high school. The woman became an inspiration for Maria, allowing her to envision a future in the field of journalism. “I knew I wanted to be a journalist, but I also knew that I wanted to do it in Spanish,” she said.

Determined to become a Spanish-language journalist, the Caracas native started interning at different newspapers and TV stations when she was a teenager. Plana also produced and hosted her own TV show from 2008 to 2011. During the first two years, the



show, called *Notas con Gabi* (*Notes with Gabi*), was produced in Spanish and uploaded to YouTube. In 2010, Plana changed the name of the show to *The Gabi Show* and began producing in English. The show was picked up by local Charlotte station WHKY-TV and broadcast regionally for over a year.

In addition to an intense professional drive and work ethic, Plana says the education and support she received at UNCP also accounts for her success. The guidance of departmental faculty, courses in videography, writing, and media law, and experience gained through student media outlets like *Carolina News Today* and *The Pine Needle* prepared her for her current job as a planning producer for CNN Spanish. “We plan what we are going to be covering in the news the next day and we also look for guests that can talk about the main topics that are going to be news,” she

said. “So if I know that Obama is going to be talking tomorrow about immigration reform, I am going to try to find Congressman Gutierrez who is a big immigration reform activist and who I know could talk about the topic. That is my job every day.”

The job is challenging. Being the youngest and least experienced person on her team, she admits feeling constant pressure to prove herself. Still, the 26-year-old journalist is satisfied with the accomplishments she has achieved in a very short time. However, she believes there is still much more to learn and especially much more to do.

“Fifteen, 20 years from now I want to be the news director for CNN Spanish. That is my goal,” she said. 🌐

A Thought:

I think that it was thanks to my perseverance that I am where I am today.

Big Dreams Yield Big Rewards for this Sports Anchor

By Sara Owen



NEWY SCRUGGS

**Sports Director
KXAS-TV
Class of 1994
Broadcasting**

“I’ve done more than I ever thought I would.”

Newy Scruggs has two dream jobs. He works both as the Sports Director and Anchor at KXAS-TV and as a talk show host at NBC Radio in Dallas, Texas. Scruggs was incredibly active as a student in the Department of Mass Communication and has also served the university as a member of the UNCP Board of Trustees. He gives heartily to the university and even has a scholarship for mass communication majors in his name.

Scruggs recalls that his favorite class at UNCP was Introduction to Mass Communication. In terms of his choice of an institute for higher education, he says he “couldn’t have gone to a better place.”

He knew by age eleven that he wanted to be a sports anchor. His dream was to play professional sports, and if he couldn’t do that, he wanted to be a sports reporter.

Newy worked for the campus TV station at UNCP when he was a student and did his internship at WRAL-TV in Raleigh, North Carolina. It was there that he met his idol, sports reporter Tom Suiter. “He loved what he did. He made it fun. I wanted to do what Tom did,” Scruggs said.

He also learned a lot from his internship mentor, Mark Curtis. Twenty-three years after that internship, Scruggs got the opportunity

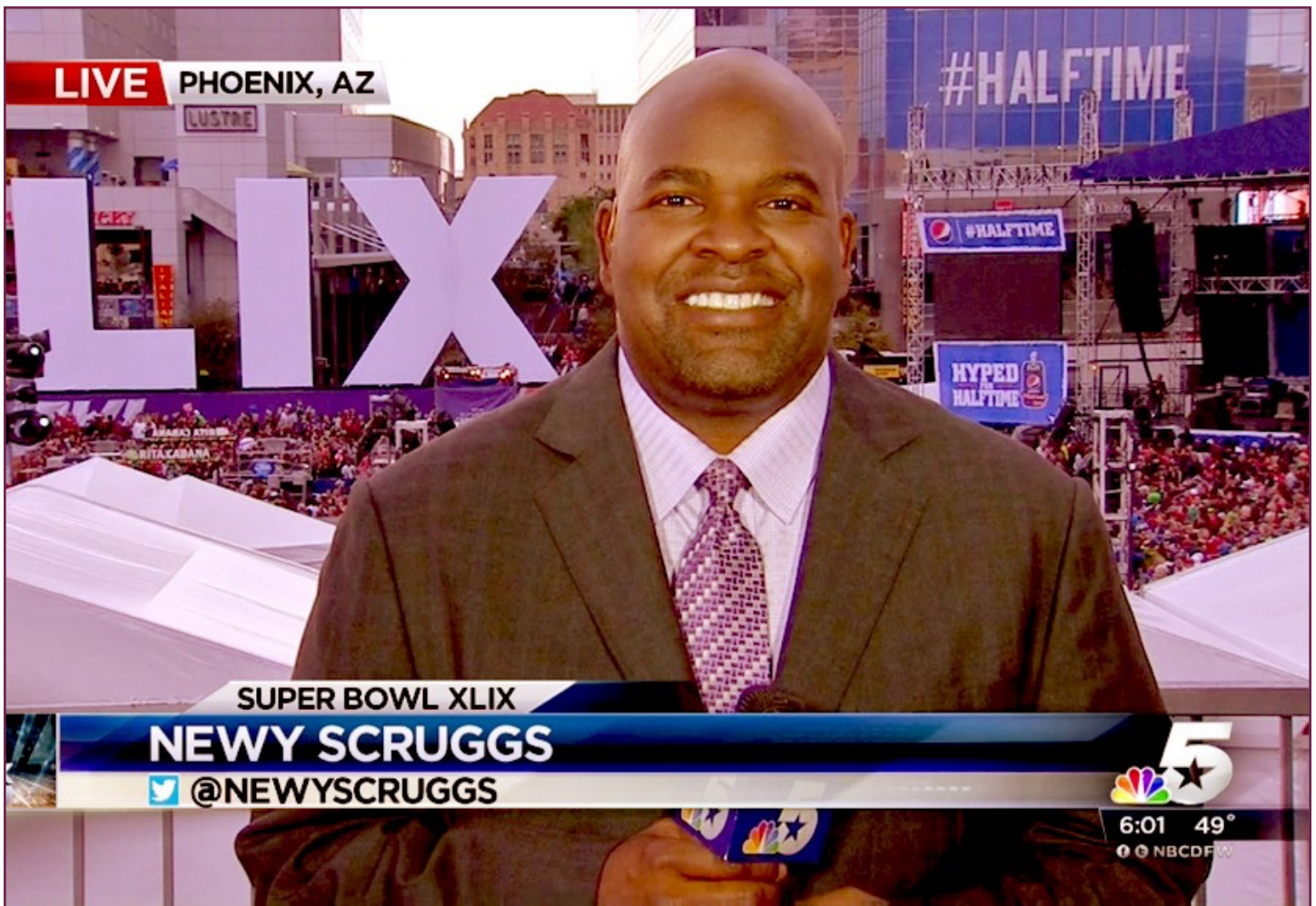
to report next to Mr. Curtis at the 2015 Super Bowl. He said it was fun and amazing to run into his old mentor again after so much time.

Newy loves being able to travel to major sports events for his job, especially the Super Bowl. He has been able to report live at the Super Bowl several times.

Scruggs was the child of an Army family, but never desired the military life. His father was enlisted and stationed at Fort Bragg Army base in North Carolina while he was a student at UNCP. He said he didn’t want the lifestyle or to have to wake up early. “I didn’t want to get up before 9AM,” he said.

Born in Germany on Dec. 31, 1970, while his father was stationed there, he moved around frequently in his life and feels that it prepared him for traveling a lot for work.

Scruggs has been doing the same job in



Dallas for 16 years now. He says his two biggest accomplishments include winning two Associated Press Sportscasting awards and being a father to his children.

“I’ve done more than I ever thought I would,” Scruggs admits.

His advice to college students is to work harder than other people. He also thinks students should take some accounting classes so they better understand finances.

“If you can’t understand numbers, you can’t negotiate contracts,” he said. “Invest in yourself.”

He encourages negotiating contracts and having someone knowledgeable about contract negotiations represent you during the process. He recalls a friend of his who lost out on a job because he represented himself and didn’t know what he was doing.

Newy also encourages dreaming big. “Dream a bigger dream than you have,” he said. “I probably didn’t dream enough.”

Networking is another important aspect of working in the industry. He says that connections get you to where you want to go. “Networking is a big thing,” Scruggs said. “Your rolodex is a big part of this business.”

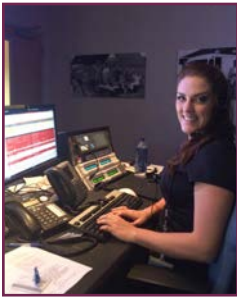
Newy’s passion for the business, studious work as an undergraduate, and dedication to a lifetime of learning helped him achieve his dreams and exceed his personal expectations. 🌟

A Thought:

Dream a bigger dream than you have. I probably didn’t dream enough.

Pixie Dust and Other Perks of the Profession

By Samantha Langley



KRISTINA SMITH

News Producer
ABC 11
Class of 2011
Broadcasting

“I love seeing the anchors I grew up with and working with them now... I mean, I grew up with these names and it’s like, oh my God, I’m writing for them now.”

Some people seem to have an innate sense for what they want to do with their lives. Kristina Smith, a 2011 graduate of UNCP Mass Communication program, was not one of those people. However, while exploring options in college, she found her calling in UNCP’s broadcasting program.

Smith started out as a biology major at East Carolina University with the hopes of becoming a physician’s assistant. She transferred to UNCP to be closer to her family and home. After trying majors in biology, nursing and chemistry, she later decided to entertain her childhood dream of becoming a broadcast journalist by taking classes in the mass communication program.

“As a little girl I would always see reporters on the news and when I thought about it, I was like hey, maybe I could do that,” Smith said.

After changing her major to broadcasting, Smith quickly fell in love with the program. She was a single mother and felt that all of the professors in the department were understanding about her situation and willing to go above and beyond for her.

“Each and every one of them brought something to my life and career,” Smith said.

Before graduating Smith was hired by WPDE in Wilmington and began producing their evening newscasts. The position included writing news stories and working through technical aspects of news production. While she felt that UNCP had prepared her for the job, she admits there were some hiccups at the start. “It was kind of overwhelming at first but I realized I had entered the real world and I adjusted quickly,” she said. Her experience in college had been producing a single, weekly news program. At WPDE she had to adjust to producing two news programs every single day of the week.

Her hard work paid off and ultimately she joined ABC 11 News in Raleigh, North Carolina.



Kristina Smith (far right) having fun on the set with the ABC 11 news team

Smith acknowledges the many perks to her job including meeting occasional celebrities like Orlando Bloom. She also enjoys working with high-profile news anchors as well. “I love seeing the anchors I grew up with and working with them now; John Clarke, Larry Stogner. I mean I grew up with these names and it’s like oh my God, I’m writing for them now,” Smith said.

Although Smith works hard on a daily basis she also points out that her employer provides nice incentives. ABC 11 News is owned by the Disney Corporation. According to Smith employees get free passes during the year to visit Disney theme parks and bring people with them. This is especially beneficial for the single mom whose 7-year-old daughter loves Ariel and Elsa from the Disney princess line. “She absolutely loves Disney and it’s awesome,” Smith said.

While Smith has a wonderful job now she says that it took real dedication to get there. “Always do your best and give one-hundred and ten percent and you never know what type of job you will land,” Smith says as advice for students.

With a little hard work, faith and a small puff of pixie dust, Kristina Smith has made her childhood dream come true. 🧚💫

A Thought:

Always do your best and give one-hundred and ten percent, and you never know what type of job you will land.

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