

Pre-Mass Comm Major Discussion Guide

Objectives:

- To explore why students choose mass communication and the ___ sequence.
 - To discover what students expect to learn in their classes.
 - To understand student's perceptions about what it is like to work in ___.
 - To explore the benefits of a USF School of Mass Communications education.
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Introduction:

Thank you for joining our focus group about the School of Mass Communications. We hope to explore today why you are interested in majoring in mass communication, what you expect to learn in your classes, and what you think it will be like to work in the ___ field. We will then talk more specifically about what USF offers.

My name is _____ and I will be the moderator for today's discussion. I am here to simply guide the discussion and my teammates are here to take notes. This discussion will last about 45 minutes to one hour.

Before we get started, if you haven't done so already, please sign-in. You will be able to get extra credit in Professor Batchelor's class, so we need a record of who is here.

We are conducting this focus group for a class project. **Your identity will be protected—we will use just your first name in our report—and nobody will be contacting you about this.** We won't be asking questions that are too personal, so please share any thoughts or opinions with us, whether positive or negative. We are aware that not everyone will have the same thoughts or opinions, which is why we encourage everyone to participate.

Also, I need you to know this discussion is being audio/video recorded so that we can type a transcript to use for our project.

Here are some ground rules:

1. I would like only one person talking at a time. I'll be sure that everyone's comments are heard.
2. I would like honest answers. However, there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions.
3. Try to feel as comfortable as possible. We are not here to judge anyone, just to listen to what you have to say. Feel free to speak openly.
4. There is no need to raise your hand to answer a question.

Introduction

First, I would like everyone to introduce themselves and tell us your hometown.

General Discussion: Choice of major

Let's start out by talking about choosing a major.

1. What majors were you considering when you entered college?
2. Did you declare a different major prior to your interest in mass comm.? What was it? Why did you initially choose it and why did you change your mind?
3. Let's do a word association. Say the first word that comes to mind when I say the following words: Mass Communications, ____.
4. Why are you interested in mass communications? What initially attracted you to mass comm.? What attracted you to ____?
5. Did someone or something inspire you to think about this field?
6. What are the benefits of majoring in ____?
7. Do you consider yourselves committed to ____? Why?
8. What kinds of research/reading have you done to learn about ____?
9. Are you interested in pursuing a double major? Or a minor? What other areas of study interest you?
10. What advice have you heard from parents or friends about ____?
11. What, if anything, concerns you about the requirements to get into the School of Mass Communications?

General Discussion: Learning expectations

(Students can reference the course lists.)

Now let's talk about your expectations once you are admitted into the School of Mass Communications.

12. What classes are you looking forward to taking and which classes are you dreading?
13. Describe your ideal class. What kinds of projects would you do? What experiences would you have?
14. What do you hope to learn in your classes?
15. What skills do you hope to acquire while you are in school?
16. How do you follow what's going on in the field?
17. What do you think you need to be doing right now to prepare yourself for the job you want in the future?
18. What advice have you heard from parents or friends about what you should do to prepare yourself while still in college?
19. Are there any extracurricular activities that you could participate in to help you prepare for your career? What activities have you already been involved in that you think will help?
20. What kinds of work experiences do you think will help you prepare for your career? Have you already had any work experiences that will help?

General Discussion: Post-college expectations

Let's talk about your plans for after college.

21. Have you considered grad school? When would you go? To study what?
 - a. (If mass comm.-related field) How do you think graduate school will help you?
22. Do you plan on working in the field?
 - a. Have you explored the job opportunities in this field? What kinds of jobs related to this field have you explored or would you be interested in exploring?
 - b. What is your dream job in this field? How committed are you to striving for that dream job?
 - c. What do you consider to be a realistic job in this field after graduation? What job skills do you think you will need to be successful?
 - d. Are there any concerns you have regarding this career field?
 - e. Take a moment to think about what your day would be like working in this field. Now, what would you be doing?
 - f. In what geographic region do you hope to land your first job after graduation?
 - g. What are your expectations regarding earnings? (initial and potential)

Specific Discussion: USF School of Mass Communications

For our final part of this conversation today, we will talk more specifically about the School of Mass Communications.

23. Do you see USF's School of Mass Communications as having any particular benefits over schools like UF or other schools that also have mass comm. programs? Any disadvantages?
24. Did you have any prior knowledge of the USF School of Mass Communications before enrolling at USF?
25. Tell me about your experience this far. Has your experience with the mass comm. program changed your mind at all about mass comm. or about your chosen field?
26. What do you see as the strong points of the School of Mass Communications? What are the weak points?

We would like to thank everyone for participating in our focus group. Everything we heard today has been very helpful.

Focus Group Transcript

Moderator: This is a focus group about the School of Mass Communications. We hope to explore today why you're interested in majoring in mass communications, what you expect to learn in your classes and what you think it will be like to work in the journalism/telecommunications field. We will then talk more specifically about what USF offers.

My name is this is Roz and this is Megan and I we'll be the moderator's for today's discussion. I'm here to simply guide the discussion and my teammates are here to take notes. This discussion will last about 45 minutes to one hour.

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Megan

Alright, here are some ground rules:

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Introduction

Moderator: First, I would like everyone to introduce themselves and tell us your hometown. We're just going to go around if everyone can say their name and what your hometown is, Jennifer we'll start with you.

Jennifer E.: My name is Jennifer and my hometown Spring Hill, Florida.

Olivia: Olivia and I was born in Germany

Leslie: My name is Leslie and Fort Myers, Florida

Jessica: I'm Jessica and I'm from Bradenton, Florida

Jennifer: I'm Jennifer and I'm from Riverview

General Discussion: Choice of major

Moderator: Alright, let's start out by talking about choosing a major. What majors were you considering when you entered college?

Jennifer E.: Mass communications

Olivia: Pre-Med

Leslie: Mass comm.

Jessica: Psychology

Jennifer: Mass comm.

Moderator: Did you declare a different major prior to your interest in mass comm.? If yes what was it?

Jennifer E.: No

Olivia: I was doing Biology

Leslie: No

Jessica: I was in psychology and business

Jennifer: No

Moderator: Why did you initially choose that major and why did you change your mind?

Olivia: I'm kind of a scientist and I thought I wanted to help people.

Jessica: I wanted to help people, and I thought I wanted to be a doctor, but there was too much science.

Moderator: Ok, let's do a word association. Say the first word that comes to mind when I say mass communications:

Jennifer E.: population

Olivia: media

Leslie: television

Jessica-news

Jennifer-television

Moderator: Good. Journalism:

Jennifer E.: report

Olivia: yea, report

Leslie: writing

Jessica: writing

Jennifer: newspaper

Moderator: Ok and telecommunications

Jennifer E.: camera

Olivia: news

Leslie: news

Jessica: t.v.

Jennifer: news

Moderator: Why are you interested in mass communications and what first attracted you to it?

Jennifer E.: I'm interested in it because it's a big field.

Olivia: I want to have my own T.V. show

Leslie: I want to work behind the scenes and I first got into it in high school

Jessica: I like writing and I know there's a lot of writing involved, but not too much and it's easier than being in straight journalism.

Jennifer: I first got into it in high school with T.V. production and thought the whole outlook of mass communications is really interesting and it didn't require much math or science, so...

Moderator: Did someone inspire you to this field or was it just doing stuff in high school?

Jennifer E.: No

Olivia: just kind of figuring out what you want out of life

Jessica: One of my mentors told me since I loved writing I should consider journalism and then I switched to broadcast news.

Moderator: Do you consider yourselves committed to journalism/telecomm? Why?

JenniferE.: 100 percent, maybe like 90 percent because I don't know what will happen when I get in the field, I don't know what's gonna happen, but yea I feel like maybe 90 percent committed to the field.

Olivia: I think that since I'm not into the program yet I think don't really have much other into the program yet, I don't really know much , but I don't really have much other choices I would prefer.

Leslie: At this point I think I'm committed, like, I'm not in the program yet so we'll see what happens, but for now yea.

Jessica: I am definitely, especially how we just learned how it's a watchdog, so especially on the political side.

Jessica: Yea I'm committed, this is something I've always wanted to do, and at this point I don't see me changing my mind. It's not worth my extra time in college.

Moderator: Good. What kinds of research or reading have you done to learn about journalism or telecom? If you don't have any that's fine too.

Jessica: Not so much reading, but I do try to watch a lot of news and read the paper daily.

Leslie: I read the paper too.

Moderator: Are you interested in pursuing a double major or a minor and if you are what were you interested in?

Jennifer E.: Education, I was thinking about getting my Bachelors in mass comm and maybe teaching it in high school.

Leslie: I've got the film certificate, which is like a film minor and I'm thinking about double majoring in marketing.

Jessica: I'm thinking about getting my minor in political science.

Jennifer: Nope, just this.

Moderator: What advice have you heard from parents or friends about journalism or telecom?

Olivia: I just heard that you have to like, basically brand yourself and make sure that they want you instead of like, because there's tons of other people that want the same position or job and

you need to be the one that they're looking for. Just make sure that you're doing the right stuff and always stay on top of the game.

Moderator: What, if anything, concerns you about the requirements to get into the School of Mass Communications?

Jessica: When I first started, I was concerned about the EDT, but it was easier than I thought it was.

Jennifer: I haven't taken that yet.

Leslie: I took the EDT today.

Megan: How do you think you did?

Leslie: I'm not sure. I hope I passed because I need it for classes.

Jessica: I heard there was a waiting list to get into the program. I'm a transfer student and I didn't realize how easy it was because they made it seem like there was this year long waiting list.

Moderator: Alright so now we are going to talk about your expectations once you are admitted to the school of mass communications so one of our first questions are, what classes are you looking forward to taking and which ones are you dreading? You can look at the list of what classes you have to look forward to.

Participant: I'm in critical thinking right now and I didn't think it was going to be that bad, but now that I'm in it I absolutely hate it, so...yeah I definitely.

P: Anything that will teach me how to work with the cameras, the handheld stuff I'm looking forward to.

P: I'm dreading taking electronic field production just because I just started working with cameras so I know it's a lot of different stuff.

M: so you are excited about the handheld stuff and you are a little bit afraid of the handheld stuff. Okay.

If you could describe your ideal class, what kind of projects would you do and what kind of experiences would you have?

P: I like when professors lecture and then test on their lectures but also take you outside of the classroom and show you real world stuff.

P: I think this is a pretty cool thing for you guys, I would like to do this when I get accepted. Doing a focus group would be pretty cool.

M: So kind of like hands-on projects that you would expect to do in the real world in your real job, or more like projects that just teach you about what you need to do?

P: Hands on.

M: What do you hope to learn in your classes? I know that's a little repetitive.

Leslie - "...like not freak out, I can help."

Moderator – "What got you guys interested in, do you make home videos or just realized you liked working with cameras and stuff?"

Leslie – "Well at first, (Inaudible) my sister, (Inaudible/Talking rapidly) it is so much fun, so I was like, okay, it's a new year signed up for it."

Moderator – "You sort of stumbled into it."

Leslie – "Yeah."

Olivia – "My parents have a (Inaudible) I used to pretend that I was a news anchor, even as a child I guess I've always had an inkling towards it."

Jessica – "I used to do the same thing!" (laughs) "Once I hit 12, I hated being on camera I still don't like seeing myself on camera that often."

Moderator – "You like the production part of it."

Jessica – "No, actually I want to be on camera, I don't know I guess a lot of people say you have to get over seeing yourself on camera, a lot of people..."

Jennifer - "I took communication because I heard it was easy, it was an easy "A" it was um, wasn't really easy, not as easy as I expected it to be, but I got a lot better."

Moderator – "Um, okay, let's talk about your plans after college. Um, if you thought about it, if not, that's okay too. Have you considered grad school?"

Jessica – I did, (Inaudible) in this field it really doesn't help at all."

Moderator – "Do all of you still plan to work in the field?"

(All respondents nod yes.)

Moderator – "Have you explored job opportunities in this field?"

Jessica – “I know when I graduate I probably am going to have to move somewhere where there’s a really small market...”

Moderator – “To get some experience first?”

Jessica – “Yeah.”

Moderator – “What’s your dream job in this field? If you could do anything, what would you do?”

Jennifer E. - ...broadcast I write/produce a radio show everyday, that’s what I want to do.

Moderator – “You want to – (Inaudible/laughter).”

Olivia - ...I wanna... Rachel Ray, in corporate daily life, but like have more the actual intellectual twist to it, that will like help college character, just an adult, they should know these things,,I don’t know something like that.”

Moderator – “That’s cool, like a talk show for young adults kinda...”

Leslie – “I would love to be a director on one of the morning shows...the dream.”

Jessica – “I would love to be co-anchor on one of the morning shows or...(Inaudible).

Jennifer – “I really haven’t thought much about that...”

Moderator – “That’s fine.”

Jennifer – I need to get past with what I...college before I get there.”

Moderator – “Yeah, it’s a little overwhelming. Uhhh, how are you committed to getting that dream-job, like what are some of the steps that you think you want to do before you get a job like that?”

Olivia - ...like internships and stuff, to be sure your name’s out there and you’re doing like positive steps showing that you’ve put forth a lot of effort...that like you are better, well not better, but more ahead... (Inaudible).

Jennifer E. – “Isn’t this business like experienced-based, the more experience the better? Well obviously, everything is but I mean. I don’t know what she said, maybe I should have started off with an internship.”

Moderator- “...communications, um but yeah, experience helps with all mass comm. They are going to hire you based on your experience.”

Jennifer E. – “...bartending school, they’d rather take someone that’s been to bartending school, rather than the person that hasn’t been to bartending school...so you know. You got people that just got their Bachelor’s and they leave here and their like whatever.

Moderator – “I think they want you to show as much as you can, that you’re really trying and you want to be in this field and that’s the way to do it is through internships.”

Moderator – “I think it’s like 95 percent of internships get offered a job, cause with that you’re getting the experience and they are willing to hire you cause they have already trained you for free – you know?”

Group laughs.

Moderator – “What do you consider to be a realistic job in this field after graduation?”

Leslie – “A reporter in the middle of nowhere.”

Jennifer E. - ...somewhere low.”

Moderator – “Working your way up?”

All – “Yeah.”

Moderator – “What skills do you think you are going to know to do, or already know to do successful?”

Olivia – “You have to be like creative like, do it before somebody else does it...”

Moderator? – “Make a portfolio...”

Jennifer E. – (Inaudible/Speaking softly)...

Jessica – “A lot of companies are going to one-man bands style reporters so you have to know how to shoot your own, edit your own stuff, um write your own stuff and be on camera.”

Moderator – “Right, (Inaudible)...

Jessica – “Yeah.”

Moderator – “Good, um, what are some concerns that you have about the field that you are choosing?”

Jessica – “Uh, money, (laughs).” “We don’t make anything...plus the economy’s not too good right now”

Moderator – “Yeah.”

Jennifer E. – “Hit a lot of people hard...”

Moderator – “Uh, in what geographic region do you hope to land your first job after graduation?”

Jessica – “I was just thinking about how much I love Florida and the sun, the beach and everything...so if it could be somewhere close to the water that’d be nice.”

Olivia – “Yeah, (laughs).”

Moderator – “Anyone looking into out of state?”

Jessica raises hand.

Moderator – “Somewhere warm?”

Unknown – “Yeah.”

Moderator: Do you see USF’s school of Mass Communications as having any type of benefits over schools like UF or other schools that also have a mass communications program, or do you see any disadvantages?

Leslie: Well, I think one main advantage is the area. Tampa is the best in Florida for what we want to do, so it is the number one advantage right there. We have all these opportunities in Tampa.

Moderator: Have you heard a lot about USF’S mass communications program, or no?

Leslie: Yes. Actually, I looked into it because I did IB. And I have a friend in it, and he told me that there is nothing else really out there. So it is basically just your county and the name of your school and getting through it.

Moderator: Did anybody look into FIU or Miami, because I know that’s another big area that has a mass communications program too?

Jessica: No

Moderator: How did you guys choose USF? Was it because it was somewhat close, or was there something that really lead you here?

Jessica: I went to Port Gulf Coast my freshman year and it is an hour and a half away from my home, and that was too far for me. So I came here and my brother was going to school here at the time. So I wanted to go to a bigger school, and it was closer.

Moderator: Jennifer, where did you go before?

Jennifer E.: I went to Hernando Community College, and I wanted to transfer here. Like I said, I heard there was a waiting list to get into this mass communications program, and someone told me it was a good program, so I wanted to transfer to USF.

Moderator: Did you apply to a lot of other schools?

Leslie: I applied to Here, FSU and the University of North Carolina. I thought about the area and that's how I made my choice.

Jennifer: This was only like 30 minutes away from home. It was the ideal choice.

Moderator: Did you have any prior knowledge of the USF's school of Mass Communications , before enrolling at USF?

All: no

Moderator: So nobody decided to come to USF specifically for the Mass Communications program?

Moderator: Tell me about your experience thus far. Has your experience with the Mass Communications program changed your mind at all about mass communications, or about your chosen field?

Moderator: Were excited, were you nervous?

Jennifer E.: I want to get accepted into the program before I could answer that.

(Everyone laughs)

Jessica: A lot of the professors they really try to scare you, not scare you out of it, but they want you to know before you get into it. Before you graduate and then realize that you hate doing it.

Moderator: Did anybody have certain perceptions about the program and then once they started taking the classes, those perceptions changed?

Olivia: A lot of them like what I have learned about media, it's almost like you don't like it. But you are sitting there telling yourself that you want to be apart of it. You have this internal conflict that you are going to be the bearer of bad news, you know?

Moderator: What do you see as the strong points of mass communication, and what are the weak points? Let's start off with any strong points, if anybody has any.

Jessica: I don't think the field is going anywhere. I don't see it as something to worry about. I mean there's going to be jobs in this field, because everybody's going to need to know about the news.

Moderator: Any weak points?

Olivia: Kind of like learning about who buys certain things. You can steer away from the truth and then create a cesspool.

Moderator: Are you talking about the mass communications program?

Olivia: No, just the field in general.

Moderator: Oh, ok.

Jennifer E.: So you want to know about the actual program, not the field?

Moderator: Both, or either one.

Jennifer E.: You know the field like how the media shows it, and how we receive the media is changing and our newspapers are declining and internet and all this. So I might be a little nervous about the future of media.

Moderator: Do guys have any questions that you want to ask us that we can answer about the field, we don't know that much about telecom, but

Jennifer E.: What about PR?

Moderator: Well, it's just like... We have to work with journalists too, the two-way communication between the actual news station, or like a company and to get it out to the public. Portraying the image of a company, about how you want them to look can help a lot. A lot of people don't really know that companies are more successful when they have someone working in the PR department because when you get out there and you are working with the media, they will be more likely to pick up your message if you have something to say about the company or a change; and your getting publicity for your company.

Moderator: We can all say that the public relations field was the one that brought us here, but there are so many different views about it. Like she said, you could work for a corporation, you could work for a non-profit, or for an agency. You could be writing speeches, or press releases, or it could even be just monitoring a blog. So it's just a lot of different aspects about it. And it really does go hand and hand with journalism. That's why you'll find a lot of journalism majors and public relation majors have to take each other's classes and have to be together a lot of times. They want to build that camaraderie with each other, because right now in a lot of places and fields there's kind of like a barrier between the two; or I guess you could say rivalry. I guess to have them get along better.

Moderator: Journalists and PR people don't like working together, but they have to rely on each other to be successful.

(Laughter)

Moderator: I guess that's a good thing about mass communications program, because they are trying to integrate everybody together and try to be one big happy family.

Jessica: Did they teach you a lot about damage control?

Moderator: We talk about certain cases and how we think we can make them better.

Moderator: But the whole point of public relations and having a public relations program is to solve the problem before it happens. You want to always be thinking ahead, so that you don't have the issue in the first place.

Moderator: Anything else?

Moderator: You guys are probably overwhelmed by now, but once you start getting into your major, it's going to clear up a lot of things, and you'll know where you're going.

Moderator: It'll be a lot more fun too.

Moderator: Well thank you guys very much, we appreciate it.