Entry-Level Professionals’ Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

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Supplemental Report

Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates

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Only about four in a 100 of the 2001 graduates reported being members of labor unions six to eight months after graduation.

The level of labor union membership has held constant from 1998 and 2001.

Journalism and mass communication graduates who were members of labor unions reported receiving higher salaries and more benefits than did graduates not members of labor unions.

Journalism and mass communication graduates are mostly undecided about how they feel about labor unions at this point in their careers.

Journalism and mass communication graduates, compared with the general population, are supportive of a large number of rights of workers, ranging from the right to equal pay to the right to free speech in the workplace.

Journalism and mass communication are strongly supportive of the rights to equal pay for women, equal treatment regardless of race or ethnicity and the right to equal pay regardless of age.
Only four in a hundred of the graduates of journalism and mass communication programs across the country in 2001 were members of labor unions six to eight months after graduation, when they returned the questionnaires in the Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates. The ratio was the same in 1997 and 1998, when questions on labor union membership also were part of the survey (Chart 1).

Bachelor's degree recipients, who make up 95% of the graduates, are a bit less likely to report union membership (4.1%) than are master's degree recipients (6.6%), though the difference is small and likely attributable to sample error. Of those graduates employed full-time, 4.3% reported union membership. Of those working full-time in communication jobs, 4.5% reported union membership.

Among graduates with a full-time job in the communication field, 1.3% (18 individuals out of 1,337 full-time employees in communication) reported being a member of The Newspaper Guild-CWA, with less than a percent being members of American Federation of TV and Radio Artists, National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians or the Writers Guild of America (0.7% together, or 10 individuals). Another 2.2% (31) individuals reported being a member of some other union, including local, non-affiliated labor units.

According to the work of Weaver and Wilhoit, union membership among working journalists fell from 29% in 1971 to 17% in 1992. This trend reflects the decline among the national working population: According to the Labor Department, 13.5% of the American workers belonged to unions in 2000, the lowest in the last 60 years.

Union membership clearly has its advantages in terms of salaries received by the graduates. In 2001, bachelor's degree recipients from journalism and mass communication programs around the country earned $1,000 more on average if they were a member of a labor union than if they were not. The median salary for graduates with a full-time job who were a member of a union was $27,000 in 2001, compared with the median salary for non-union graduates of $26,000 (Chart 2). The gap between graduates with union and graduates not members of union also was $1,000 in 1998. A year earlier it had been $3,000.

Union members also get better benefits. Of nine benefits listed, including such things as major medical coverage, dental coverage and life insurance, bachelor's degree recipients with full-time jobs had an average of six available as employer fully or partially paid. For those not in a labor union, the average was 5.

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Journalism and mass communication graduates, despite the low level of union membership, do not hold negative view of labor unions (Chart 3). In 2001, only about one in 10 of the graduates expressed disapproval of labor unions, a figure actually lower than for the nation generally. Journalism and mass communication graduates are more ambivalent than the nation, however, with about half saying they are unsure how they feel about labor unions, and a third saying they approve. The approval figure is considerably lower than for the general public.

About 15% of the journalism and mass communication graduates said they would like to join a union, while 21% of American workers gave the same answer in a 1999 Gallup poll (Chart 4). About 30% of the graduates said they did not want to join a labor union, compared with 76% of the general population. The number of graduates who were unsure about their desire to join a labor union was 55%, compared to only 3% of the general population.

In addition to their views on labor unions, the 2001 survey also asked journalism and mass communication graduates about their sense of their work environment and about their attitudes towards the rights of workers, using questions identical to those used in a national survey conducted a year earlier for the AFL-CIO.

Employed journalism and mass communication graduates are much like the general public in terms of their views of their work situation (Chart 5). Of the graduates, 48% said either that their work situation was fine or that it needed only small improvements, compared with 42% of the general public. Only about two in 10 of each group feel that a lot of improvement is needed.

Journalism and mass communication graduates were more supportive than the national population of the right to retirement plan that includes a contribution of the employers and of the right to share in company profits when a firm does well (Chart 6).

The right to job security was considered essential by six in 10 journalism and mass communication graduates, but only by half of those responding to the AFL-CIO national survey (Chart 7). The same 10% difference was found between the 2001 graduates and those responding to the national survey regarding the right to opportunities for education and training that improve one’s skills (Chart 7).

Nearly nine in 10 of the journalism and mass communication graduates considered essential the right to be treated with respect by one’s employer and the right not to be sexually harassed at work, while just over half of respondents to the national survey gave the same answer (Chart 8). Journalism and mass communication graduates were more similar to the general public in support of the right to personal privacy. Journalism and mass communication graduates, however, were much more likely to feel it essential to have freedom of speech on the job. For the graduates, however, that figure was only about 55%.

The 2001 journalism and mass communication graduates were very supportive of the right to equal pay for women and the right to equal treatment regardless of race and ethnicity. The figures for the graduates were about 25% higher than for the national survey respondents (Chart 9). Seventy-seven-
point-four percent of the mass communication graduates said it was essential to protect the right to equal
treatment regardless of one’s age, compared to the 54% of those responding to the AFL-CIO national
survey (Chart 9).

Compared to the general public, more 2001 graduates considered the right to sick leave to be
essential (64% vs. 54%) (Chart 10). Support for overtime pay for employees who work more than 40
hours per week was identical in the two groups. The right to take time off to care for a new baby or sick
family member was considered essential by larger numbers of graduates then by the population generally
(66% vs. 55%). Journalism and mass communication graduates also were more likely to feel it essential
to have health coverage than did the general population (61% vs. 34%). Graduates also felt more
strongly that there is a right to a living wage that provides an income above the poverty line (79% vs.
56%).

Concluding Comments

While small numbers of the journalism and mass communication graduates are members of labor
unions, this isn’t because they are opposed to membership or negative to them. At this stage in their
careers, the graduates seem to lack firmly held opinions about unions and remain open to union
membership.

Union membership certainly provided the 2001 graduates advantages, both in terms of salaries
received and in terms of benefits at least partially paid by employers.

Compared to the general public, a higher percentage of the 2001 journalism and mass
communication graduates said it was essential to protect a number of rights in the workplace. They are
particularly concerned about the right to be treated with respect by one’s employer and the right not to be
sexually harassed at work. The graduates also are strongly supportive of the rights to equal pay for
women, equal treatment regardless of race or ethnicity and, to a bit lesser degree, the right to equal pay
regardless of age.

The sense of worker rights of the journalism and mass communication graduates no doubt
reflects the idealism of the young worker. This idealism can serve as a positive force in the
communication work environment and an opportunity for employers and unions to guarantee workplace
equality and fair play. Any sense that these rights are not respected, on the other hand, can lead to
employee frustration. The graduates largely have an open mind toward labor unions, and unions could be
the source of assistance if the rights are not provided by the employers.
A new battery of questions on attitudes toward Unions was added to the Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates, an annual survey designed to monitor the employment rates and salaries of graduates of journalism and mass communication programs in the United States, including Puerto Rico. A single item on union membership had been included in earlier surveys, in 1997 an 1998.

Since 1997, the Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates has been conducted at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. From 1987-1996, the survey was conducted at Ohio State University.

Each year a sample of schools is drawn from those listed in the Journalism and Mass Communication Directory, published annually by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, and The Journalist's Road to Success: A Career Guide, formerly published and printed by the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund, Inc., and now available on the web at the following site: http://djnewspaperfund.dowjones.com/fund/cg_jschools.asp. Administrators at the selected schools are asked to provide the names and addresses of their spring bachelor's and master's degree recipients. A questionnaire was mailed in November 2001 to all spring graduates receiving either a bachelor's or a master's degree from the selected programs. A second questionnaire was sent to nonrespondents in January 2002. A third mailing was sent in March 2002 to graduates who had not responded to the first two mailings. The questionnaire asked about the respondent's experiences both while a student and in the months since graduation. Included were questions about university experiences, job-seeking and employment, and salary and benefits.

In 2001, the survey was mailed to 7,382 individuals whose names and addresses were provided by the administrators of the 103 programs. A total of 3,112 returned the questionnaires by the end of May of 2002. Of the returns, 2,892 were from students who reported they actually had completed their degrees during the April to June 2001 period. The remaining 220 had completed their degrees either before or after the specified period, despite their inclusion in the spring graduation lists. A total of 571 questionnaires was returned undelivered and without a forwarding address. Return rate, computed as the number of questionnaires returned divided by the number mailed, was 42.2%. Return rate, computed as the number returned divided by the number mailed minus the bad addresses, was 45.7%. Of the 2,892 usable questionnaires, 2,739 (94.7%) were from bachelor's degree recipients and 153 were from those who received a master's degree.

Data in this report are from the bachelor's and master's degree recipients and can be projected to the estimated 38,400 students who earned bachelor's degrees and the 3,240 students who earned
master's degrees in academic year 2000-2001 from the 458 colleges and universities across the United States and Puerto Rico offering programs in journalism and mass communication.

Sample error is $\pm 1.8\%$ at the .05 confidence level, meaning that the odds are 19 to one that the figures presented in this report are within plus or minus sample error of what would have been obtained had all graduates of journalism and mass communication programs, rather than a sample of these graduates, completed questionnaires. Sample error, of course, is only one of the sources of error in survey.

Funding for the 2001 graduate survey was provided by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication, Cox Newspapers Inc., The Freedom Forum, Gannett, the Hearst Corporation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the National Association of Broadcasters, the Newsletter & Electronic Publishers Foundation, the Newspaper Association of America Foundation, The Newspaper Guild–CWA, the Scripps Howard Foundation, and the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia.2

The data from the journalism and mass communication graduates are compared with data obtained from the Gallup poll Public Opinion 1999, the 2001 Associated Press poll on labor unions, and with data from a national telephone survey of a probability sample of 801 persons 18 years old and older conducted July 5 to 9, 2001, by Peter D. Hart Research Associates. The Hart survey was conducted for the AFL-CIO.3

Sample error for the Hart AFL-CIO survey is $\pm 3.5\%$. Differences between the national sample of journalism and mass communication graduates and the Hart AFL-CIO survey of 3.9% are not likely to be attributable to sample error.

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2Special thanks is given to the following University of Georgia students who worked as research assistants or research clerks for the 2001 Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates: Leslie Buschbom, Kim Cooper, Elizabeth Crevis, George Daniels, Shelley George, Erica Hartman, Keerti Hasija, Sara Hays, Jisu Huh, Gilad Kat, Anna-Elisa Mackowiak, Becca Martin, Summer Saunders, Vandana Shankar, Lacey Smith, Hien Vu, Jennifer Wiggins, and Katherine Wooten.

3The authors thank the AFL-CIO and Peter D. Hart Research Associates for making the data available for analysis.
1. Union membership of JMC graduates
Union members in first year of graduation

Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates
Associated Press Poll, August 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Bachelor's</th>
<th>Bachelor's and Master's</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

National: 13.5% union members

2. Yearly salary for union members and non-union workers
Median salary per year for Bachelor’s degree recipients with full-time jobs: union and non-union

Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Union members</th>
<th>Non-union workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>$26,000</td>
<td>$23,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>$27,000</td>
<td>$26,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Approval of labor unions

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of labor unions?

Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates
Associated Press Poll, August 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Journalism graduates</th>
<th>General public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates
Associated Press Poll, August 2001

4. Desire to belong to labor union

Question: Would you personally like to belong to a labor union at work?

Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates
Gallup Poll, September 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Journalism graduates</th>
<th>General public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know, no opinion</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Overall job situation

Question: Thinking about your overall situation including things such as wages, benefits and working conditions, would you say: 1. Things are fine as they are. 2. Small improvements are needed. 3. Some improvements are needed. 3 A lot of improvements are needed. 5. I’m not sure.

Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates
Hart AFL-CIO Survey, July 2001

6. Retirement

Q. The right to retirement plan that includes a contribution of the employer.
Q. The right to share in company profits when a firm does well.

Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates
Hart AFL-CIO Survey, July 2001
7. Security and training

Q. The right to job security. Q. The right to opportunities for education and training that improve one’s skills.

Percents who say essential to protect

![Bar chart showing percentages of journalism graduates and general public on job security and education and training.](chart)


8. Personal rights

Q. The right to be treated with respect by one’s employer. Q. The right to personal privacy on the job. Q. The right of freedom of speech on the job. Q. The right not to be sexually harassed at work.

Percents who say essential to protect

![Bar chart showing percentages of journalism graduates and general public on personal rights.](chart)

9. Equality

Q. The right to equal pay for women. Q. The right to equal treatment on job regardless of race or ethnicity. Q. The right to equal treatment regardless of one’s age.

Percents who say essential to protect

Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates
Hart AFL-CIO Survey, July 2001

10. Benefits

Q. The right to sick leave without losing one’s job. Q. The right to overtime pay for employees who work more than 40 hours in a week. Q. The right to take time off to care for a new baby or sick family member. Q. The right to health coverage, with the employer paying most of the cost. Q. The right to a living wage that provides an income above the poverty line for a full-time worker.

Percents who say essential to protect

Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates
Hart AFL-CIO Survey, July 2001