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Find Passion and Discovery in College Radio Talk Show: *A Geneseo Today Experience*

Jesus Hernandez

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ABSTRACT

Geneseo Today is an original WGSU public affairs program, featuring conversations with community and campus newsmakers about important issues, trends, and real-world topics affecting the local community, airing in two half-hour segments each weekend. As the Executive Producer and Host of *Geneseo Today* during the 2018–2019 academic year, I conducted several interviews for the episodes, and I edited and produced the half-hour episodes to broadcast on a twenty-mile radius. During the academic year, I encountered triumphs, downfalls, gained skills, memories, and life-long lessons that will serve me upon entering the workforce.

PROLOGUE

During my time as the *Geneseo Today* Executive Producer and Host, my main objective was to see what is going on at the college campus, the town of Geneseo, and the surrounding communities. I went out to find guests, discuss a topic, edit the interview, and produce the final product to broadcast over the airwaves. Since I did not know all that was going on in Geneseo during my undergraduate years, I wanted to inform students and Geneseo residents on under-discussed topics such as nutrition, health, education, and civic engagement. Throughout the year, I wanted to examine topics from various guests, along with putting some personal interest in the mix.

Towards the end of the year, I attended the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System Conference in New York City, where I met important personnel in radio media, and gained exposure to new ideas in the field. Additionally, I believed the conference would stimulate creativity for the *Geneseo Today* program and inspire a strong finish for the final weeks of the academic year. My experiences as Executive Producer and Host of this public affairs show has been a transformational experience in my final year as an undergrad.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

In June 2018, I learned that I got a job as Producer and Host of *Geneseo Today*. I was excited to start, and I felt that this experience might open many doors. However, I had many questions because I didn't know what to do. I felt stuck. I kept thinking to myself, "Where am I going to find people to interview? Who should I interview? What are the topics need to be talked about?" These questions guided my planning throughout the summer.

I returned to campus to begin the academic year. I was nervous because I didn't know what to do; I felt that I had no direction to turn. Three weeks into the semester, I still hadn't produced an episode. Because my faculty director had expected me to already have produced one, I felt ashamed and embarrassed. One night, as I was catching up on some homework assignments, I said to myself, "What's going on—Why are you not interviewing people? They won't reach out to you, so you need to start contacting people! Otherwise, it's going to be a long year!" So, I began contacting people one after another, and soon I got a "Yes" from a student ambassador. I felt like I had accomplished something, even though it was just one yes.

The day of that first interview was interesting. I was prepared; I had mapped out my questions for the interview, but I was still nervous. I didn't know what to expect from this interview, or if it would sound good when finished. Though I was filled with self-doubt, I edited and produced it, and it was a better first product than I had anticipated.

Before too long, I began scheduling people on a regular basis. I would regularly interview up to three people each week. Producing shows and meeting deadlines—on top of my academic courses and extracurricular activities—became sometimes exhausting. But I did not let exhaustion become an obstacle; I kept interviewing people and producing episodes weekly.

To produce episodes, I learned how to use the software Audacity. Though my supervisor advised me that a half-hour episode could take two or three hours to edit, I quickly learned that some episodes could take up to five hours, as I might have to add a voiceover to add minutes, or heavily edit an interviewee's responses. At times I wished there was a machine that would automatically edit episodes, but then I also understood that the process of editing was itself enjoyable. To pace my recording schedule and avoid having to record the whole broadcast in one take, I would do the first ten minutes on one day, and then work on the next ten minutes the next day, until I fully produced the episode to send it to the faculty director for airing.

When I went home for fall break, I felt relieved. I had already met the expectation of producing eight episodes for the semester, but I wanted to do more. I continued to meet people to get an idea of additional topics to address. I continued to interview more people and produce more episodes. By the end of the semester, I had recorded

fifteen episodes, and of those, eleven aired. I had interviewed student leaders, faculty members, local town leaders, and even the College President.

Interviewing the College President was one of the highlights of the year. I planned the interview early in the year, and anticipated recording it by the end of November. Though I was nervous, I felt honored to interview her. I thought, “I wonder how many people can get to say that they were able to get a full thirty-minute conversation with her?” Once the fall semester was over, and I finished editing my final interview, which was the college president’s interview, I felt a sense of peace. But I knew that it was far from being over; I still had to find eight new people to interview for the next semester.

COMING TO AN END

In the new semester, I was ready to continue to give my best. I was promoted to be the Executive Producer and Host of the show, and I continued to interview more people from Geneseo’s administration, as well as the Mayor of Geneseo. I believed it was my duty to put all my energy into this, but something else had changed. No longer was I concerned about making the quota; I was more focused on learning new things about the happenings in Livingston County. I discovered more about what I could do to improve the show, and what I could do to tailor it to my needs and special interests. One example was when I did “Asking for a Friend,” and discussed specific health issues from anonymous students. This was something I wanted to talk about, as I have a passion for public health.

In March 2019, the faculty director and I went to the 2019 Intercollegiate Broadcasting System Conference in New York City. I initially wanted to go to seek advice from experts and professionals, and maybe find a job in this field for the years after I graduate from Geneseo.

Overall, the conference was amazing! Though I didn’t get a job offer, I learned about getting the news on the radio, picking the best staff, strategizing in the business, navigating lawsuits, and much more. I also went on a tour to a radio station and met the people who worked there. They advised on what I can do to find work in radio and public health fields. In addition, a WGSU alum joined us for the Awards Ceremony, where WGSU was named a finalist for “Best Promotional/Contest Award” for the 2018 Genny-Fest Music Festival and Food Truck Rodeo. Not only did I meet many people who shared my passion for radio, the conference also sparked some creativity that I wanted to take with me for my show.

My final interview was with the Mayor of Geneseo, Margaret Duff. After recording her interview and producing and submitting the episode to my faculty director for the last time, part of me was sad because it meant that my time as the program host was over. I also appreciated that I got the opportunity to do this, as I learned valuable experiences and skills for future directions. I walked out of the studio for the last time,

I left with my head held high, knowing that I did a great job, and I had contributed my service to the station to the fullest.

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENTS

One of the things that I learned during the journey was to work on self-confidence about producing these episodes and sending them to the faculty director. I honestly felt that I was too much a perfectionist, that all the episodes had to look excellent, or I'd feel guilty that I hadn't put forth my strongest effort. Throughout the year, I was able to use this experience as a springboard to make even better episodes than the last one.

After producing these episodes, one of my goals is to be okay with failure as long as I'm learning and changing. I have had a hard time accepting failure because I would feel really guilty. I need to acknowledge that in the end, everything will be fine and will be a stepping stone towards becoming a better person.

LEARNING OUTCOMES & THE FUTURE AHEAD

Among of the learning outcomes that I have gotten out of being a part of this transformational experience was to speak better in public. I learned how to speak clearly and watched the pace of asking questions. The second learning outcome was to produce and edit content. I learned so much from editing through the Audacity software, how to split cut, lower and increase audio levels, and perform voiceovers. Lastly, I felt that my organizational skills improved. I was disorganized in the beginning because I had a lot of people to interview, and I lost track as to which interview I was preparing for, which were already recorded, and which were ready to air. To solve it, I broke everything down into sections such as upcoming interviews, who to contact for interview, and finished interviews. I checked it on a regular basis, and updated as I go. This way, I was ready to give updates to my faculty director when I met with him, as well as to the other executive council members.

As time went on, I interviewed student ambassadors, representatives from board of elections, community leaders, and even the Provost and the President of the College. I have truly enjoyed talking to people about what's really going on in Geneseo. I appreciated being the program host because I was passionate and invested my time interviewing people and producing content to the audience.

I never thought I would ever exceed the amount as my predecessors have done in previous years. Usually past producers have produced sixteen interviews by the end of the year, but I produced twenty-three. Regardless, I didn't care about the quantity of the episodes. I sensed that the show's mission was to shed light on topics with guest speakers and build a bridge between the college students and the residents. I always gave my fullest effort in preparing for the interviews, meeting interviewees outside of Blake Hall, and walking them to the studio. I have appreciated the feedback on how I can become a better producer. Being a part of the station and taking on the role of

host and producer of *Geneseo Today* made me become more reflective overall. It helped me realize more what I had accomplished so far, and what work still needed to be done. Regardless of whether I work in radio again, this experience gave me valuable tools and skills that will be useful in a breadth of careers. My ultimate goal is to use the foundation of radio and communication to promote wellness, advance prevention, and reduce health disparities in the community.

Overall, it's been an amazing time being a part of WGSU 89.3-FM. I am fortunate to have spent my final undergraduate year with WGSU. Being the producer and host of this program will hold a special place as I leave Geneseo, and I'm excited to see what new challenges the next chapter of my life will bring.

