

University of Missouri

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# MIZZOU

## Network Connections

Emmy-Award winning TV producer recounts lessons learned during student employment.



Emmy-Award winning TV producer Jen Nickels, BJ '05, left, counts former boss Diane Dahlmann, MizzouRec director, as a mentor and friend. Nickels says she learned self-confidence, poise and leadership skills from her student employment experience working with Dahlmann and other professional staff.

*Story by Angela Dahman*

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*Photos by David Freyermuth*

“**T**hink about your time here not just as a job but as a paid internship in the lessons of life,” Emmy-Award winning TV producer Jen Nickels, BJ '05, urged at a rally for about 400 MizzouRec student employees Aug. 24.

“My experiences, the people I met, the things I learned [from working at MizzouRec] have defined me as much or more than my degree,” she said.

While a journalism student at the University of Missouri, Nickels logged four years as a member of Team Mizzou, the MizzouRec student staff training and development program. During that time, she provided administrative support to senior leadership, wrote press releases, helped plan events and eventually produced a documentary to commemorate the opening of the renovated and expanded Student Recreation Complex in 2005.

“At first it was just a job,” Nickels said. But as she fielded questions from MizzouRec professional staff, she realized “it was just as important to my managers that I learn from this experience and that I grow from it.”

In an interview after the rally, Nickels credited the Missouri School of Journalism for giving her the tools and strong foundation to succeed as a journalist. But she says experiences outside the classroom — including Team Mizzou, Greek Life and student

government — prepared her to balance life and work in the real world, while also allowing her to observe different styles of leadership up close.

“You can’t teach poise, you can’t teach confidence,” Nickels said. “You learn that from watching other people.”

In the latter part of her employment, Nickels worked closely with MizzouRec Director Diane Dahlmann. More than a manager, Dahlmann became a mentor and friend. Most important, Nickels said, is that “she trusted me. When you are 22 years old and someone trusts your ideas, initiative ... it made me feel empowered and ‘adult.’ ”

Upon graduating in 2005, Nickels took the lessons she learned — conflict management, time management, creativity and confidence — and applied them as a producer in a Cincinnati newsroom. After only two years on the job, she was promoted to morning executive producer at age 25. Five years later, she moved to Cleveland, where she crossed paths with fellow Tiger Russ Mitchell, BJ ’82.

Both received Emmy Awards in June 2014 for their work covering the news of three Cleveland kidnapping victims found alive May 6, 2013.

“When I look at the Emmy, I remember what it was like to be in the control room and see the story unfold,” Nickels said. The journalists saw “many unforgettable things that never made the air,” she

reflected.

Nickels' team chose to focus on the positive. "What I'm most proud of, what made us stand out, is that we focused on, 'They are alive, and it's a miracle.' "

It wasn't until a couple of days later, when she was able to go home and decompress, that the tears came. "You can't help but be swept up in the emotion of the story," Nickels said. "Stories like that make us all human."

Now a nightside senior executive producer for Wave 3 News in Louisville, Kentucky, Nickels displays her Emmy next to a stone from Rothwell Gymnasium. It's a reminder of lessons learned where she least expected it.

"The stone is a reminder of the foundation I built here at Mizzou, the confidence I developed here that enabled me to walk into a top newsroom in the country and succeed," Nickels said in closing at the Team Mizzou Rally. "But it's also a reminder of the people who helped me build it. The people who believed in me, who pushed me to be my best, my fellow Team Mizzou members and some of the leaders in this room today."



Jen Nickels presents a \$1,000 Team Mizzou Rothwell Club Scholarship for textbooks to junior journalism major Liz Henderson at the Team Mizzou Rally Aug. 24, 2014.

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