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## Nebraska Women in Journalism: The Groundbreakers Before Us and Surrounding Us

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NEBRASKA WOMEN IN JOURNALISM:  
THE GROUNDBREAKERS BEFORE US AND SURROUNDING US

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of University Honors Program  
Requirements  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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## **Abstract**

*Nebraska women in journalism: The groundbreakers before us and surrounding us* is a 30-minute documentary about six Nebraska women and their journeys as journalists. This project seeks to answer the question: “How do women in the media overcome gender bias?” I interviewed six women ranging in age and from a variety of journalistic fields to discover what biases they faced in the industry as well as their advice for young journalists as we enter into a field that is constantly evolving. I discovered that Nebraska women in the media do experience the bias we see throughout the nation and in other industries. Women in journalism have come a long way to closing the gap between men and women, but there still need to be more women in leadership roles. Women also deserve to feel confident in their work and respected in their industries. Women of color need more space in the media. They make up almost 8% of print news, 12.6% of local TV news and just over 6% of local radio news, while white men make up over 50% in both print news and local radio news. Native journalists also need more support, especially because Native Americans are misrepresented in mainstream media. There are many amazing Nebraska women breaking boundaries in journalism. Amplifying some of these voices helps other Nebraska women know they aren’t alone in their struggles, and it helps unify us to continue the tradition of groundbreaking that the many Nebraska women journalists before us started.

**Key words:** Nebraska women in journalism, documentary, journalism, Nebraska women

## **Dedication/Appreciation**

First, I want to thank all of my professors in the College of Journalism and Mass Communications for supporting my educational journey. I especially want to thank Jessica Walsh, Kelli Boling and Alan Eno for supporting me in this project. I also want to thank all the amazing Nebraska women in journalism. They inspire me every day and remind me to feel confident in myself.

## **Nebraska women in journalism: The groundbreakers before us and surrounding us**

The idea for this project came to me because I was constantly seeing women being judged on social media for doing normal things, like their jobs. I was frustrated with the world around me, especially as I am a woman. It made me wonder how women in the industry I was studying dealt with biases they faced and what those biases were.

I chose to do a documentary on Nebraska women in journalism for a few reasons. I chose to do a documentary because I've always enjoyed longer forms of journalism that go in-depth on one topic. Documentary-making is an industry I am interested in learning more about and getting more experience in. I chose the topic of my documentary to be Nebraska women in journalism because it's a part of who I am. I wanted to get an idea of what the field I was entering into post-graduation was like. While conducting interviews for my documentary, I also started to notice how my peers were going through some of the challenges I was learning about from my sources. I even started to notice some of these things in my own life, like imposter syndrome or comments I received that my male friends didn't. Overall, Nebraska has many amazing and inspirational women in journalism, and I wanted to amplify some of their voices to share their stories and help the next generation of journalists know they aren't alone.

This documentary is 30 minutes in length with six interviews, voiceover and countless b-roll clips. The length was chosen because I wanted to make sure I had the time to cover as much as I could on the topic. I also needed to balance making the documentary while still having classes. I felt that 30 minutes was an amount of time I could handle in the amount of time we had for the project. Each interview I conducted brought a different and important aspect to the documentary. My interview with Eileen Wirth offered me insight into the history of women in journalism in Nebraska because she wrote a book about that very topic. She also shared her own

story of working for the Omaha World-Herald when women were first breaking into sections outside of the women's section. Shirley Sneve offered me the perspective of a Native American journalist. Anna Sims gave me the perspective of a freelance journalist and someone who graduated when the industry was going through some big changes. Erin Sorensen gave me insight into being a woman covering sports. Lily Smith shared her story of graduating during COVID-19, being a young journalist and being one of the few Black journalists in the industry. Grace Bellinghausen offered me her story of being a young journalist and being laid off at a young age in the industry. All of these interviews brought different perspectives, stories and advice.

For equipment, I originally elected to use a JVC camera because it was the only video camera I had knowledge of using. Over time, I chose to switch to a Sony Z90 camera because it offered better quality and was easier to carry around and use. For all of my interviews, I used a LAV mic kit to ensure I was getting the best audio possible. Any footage I did not record myself I got with permission from my interviewees. I also used a few photos from the Internet for journalists mentioned in the history section of the documentary and for one journalist mentioned later on that I don't have easy access to.

In editing the project together, I used Adobe Premiere Pro. Adobe products are available for free through the college. I have used Premiere Pro throughout my years at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, so I knew how to use it. For my editing process, I first went through all my interviews and found quotes I wanted to use. Then, I organized the documentary into the different sections I envisioned and put the quotes that matched those sections together. Next, I organized the clips within those sections to flow, added b-roll and wrote voiceover. I recorded the

voiceover and added it in. I finally put all the sections together, added music and made some edits to clean up the audio throughout.

The creation of this documentary applies to my discipline because documentaries are a form of journalism. They are a way to share stories in a longer and deeper manner. I was able to apply the many skills I learned in my time at the UNL College of Journalism and Mass Communications. First, I utilized my reporting skills, from writing emails and interview questions to conducting the interviews and asking follow-up questions. I also used my knowledge with equipment. The different cameras, tripods, microphones and lights I used throughout were all from the journalism college, and I learned how to use them in my time at college. I also learned how to use Premiere Pro over the years as a journalism and broadcasting major. Lastly, putting together a story in a succinct way that flows was a skill I learned and honed at UNL.

This documentary also helps me prepare for my future as a woman in journalism. I learned about challenges I may face as I start in the industry post-graduation. Most importantly, I learned that I am not alone. Any feelings of self-doubt I may feel aren't unique to only me. The women around me are likely feeling them or know the feeling from previous experience. I can lean on the other women around me for support, and I can offer them support as well.

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