

AAF Focus Groups Probe Advertising Education Readiness

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The academic committee of AAF conducted two focus groups during the Washington, DC, AAF Conference in June. Specific areas of probe included:

- *How well prepared are today's graduates, and if not, what areas of basic skills and knowledge do they appear to be lacking?*
- *What skills or classes would better prepare them?*
- *How important is the college or university?*
- *How important is professional experience of the faculty? How important is the Ph.D.?*
- *How important are internships?*
- *What advice do you have to share?*

While the complete results of these groups will, hopefully, be the subject of a journal article, it is interesting to note the following. Participants continue to believe that students need to read, write, communicate, think and have a strong work ethic. Social skills are important, especially the ability to work in a group as many teams are self-directed. Most participants felt that graduates were lacking in Internet ability, as well as sales and demographic background - especially Hispanic information.

There were diverse opinions on the importance of the college as well as the professional experience of the faculty, with pros and cons to each side. Interestingly, however, almost all indicated that the Ph.D. was not that important. One participant indicated that he felt that professors (often with Ph.D.'s) do not understand the business.

Almost all of the participants indicated that internships were essential. Most indicated that they were able to pay interns; however, even if students could not be paid, the professionals felt that students should still have that experience. Finally, advice ranged

from: "Advertising is not one general area. Students need training in a specific area" to "I need people who can sell." It was concluded that:

1. The AAF academic committee needs to do a better job telling the story of advertising education in today's colleges and universities. Participants of the focus groups indicated that a strong liberal arts background with practical training is what they want. Today's accredited programs have that mix between liberal arts and journalism/mass communication courses.

2. Professionals expect the entry level person to know how to use software, like Photoshop, how to interpret a statistical print-out, and how to market to the various subcultures of America.

3. The academic committee must continue to emphasize the teaching of multiculturalism in advertising/mass communication classes. That teaching should be across the curriculum.

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**— one of the findings of
the AAF focus groups
conducted in
June, 1999.**

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