Mass Communication

Interviews of Mass Communication Professionals/Gatekeepers

Background to the Assignment

One of the defining characteristics of mass media is that they are fairly large institutions. On one level, the nature of these media institutions is defined by the economic context in which they work, their political and social roles in society, their economic goals or aims, and who owns them. Yet, on another level, these institutions are defined by the jobs performed by people in them; that is, what roles individuals play, what duties they perform, how they are trained, and how much autonomy they have in creating content. In this way, mass communication organizations may be quite complex "senders" of messages because they contain many people with interconnecting roles.

The Assignment

Your job in this project is to interview a mass media professional. You will begin by asking the interviewee about the actual mass media product that they take part in "sending." IMPORTANT: For this project, I want you to interview an individual who produces messages (news writers, reporters, film directors or producers, news directors, program directors, music producers, etc) not one who distributes or exhibits messages (sales clerk at Best Buy, multiplex manager, etc.).

To explain this even further, in a TV station you might interview a news director or producer, or a reporter. These people produce news or make decisions about what will be on the news. You wouldn’t interview the camera operator or even the director since they don’t produce the news or make decisions about the content.

Before you start the interview process, have me okay your choice of person. This way we can be sure you are on the right track. If you don’t check with me and select the wrong type of person, this will result in a significant reduction in your final grade.

Get as many specific details as you can about the product, the market to which it is targeted, and its competition among rival products. Then, ask each interviewee about:

1. their position in the organizational chart of the company;
2. the specific role they play as a sender of messages;
3. their views of the organization in terms of how well it works economically (as a business) and socially (in any relevant political manner);
4. what sorts of influence and power they wield in the sending process (i.e., who they answer to and who answers to them);
5. their day-to-day duties and tasks.
IMPORTANT: Your are inquiring about gatekeeping roles and functions. You want to
gauge the "power" of a person to make messages within in the organizational hierarchy in
which they work, and, ultimately, their "power" to influence receivers of their messages.

*Use quotes liberally!*

Your final project should be in essay format, not a mere transcription of your interviews.
I am not so much interested in length as quality of writing and exposition. But if you need
a rough page limit, I’d say that 5 pages at a minimum is necessary to do this assignment
well.

**Due Date**

This is a flexible due date assignment. You may turn this assignment in between
**February 20th and March 31st.**

You must tell me what day you will turn this in by **February 3rd.** Once you commit to a
date on the 3rd, you are bound by that date and you cannot change it without a penalty to
your grade.

Of course you are allowed to turn it in before the date you agree to.

I am also not bound to return graded assignments until after March 31st.