



Melea McCreary, '11 **Producer, TODAY Show**

Melea McCreary calls her professional journey "a series of fortunate events." Although she originally planned to attend graduate school for film, McCreary instead completed a fellowship with NBC, where she still works. The 2011 broadcasting and electronic media (the program now called creative media production) graduate recently shared more about her role with the TODAY Show, impactful people and moments from her time in Gaylord College and more.

What is your favorite memory from your time at Gaylord College?

Scott Hodgson taught an advanced class called Client-Based Productions that had us producing an awards show in Las Vegas! It was a small group of students. We worked 14-16 hour days leading up to the big show, but traveling to Vegas and watching all that hard work play out so seamlessly come showtime was incredibly satisfying. That was my first real experience in large-

What do you consider to be the most significant moments of your career so far?

I wish I had a fun, lighthearted answer for this one. The most significant, character-building moments of my career come from working the stories that are toughest to cover. We get to do some pretty incredible things at TODAY. But we are still a news show, and when something terrifying happens, people turn on the news to find out what's going on. When news is rapidly unfolding, the public looks to you to do your job, do it well and do it accurately. All of those days in the trenches with the anchors working wall-to-wall, 10, 12, 14 hour breaking news shifts are the ones that mean the most. Because we saw a story through to the end, and we helped people watching feel a little less scared.

How did Gaylord College prepare you for your future career?

Gaylord gave me a strong foundation

scale production -- experience that would serve me well at NBC.

Do you have a favorite faculty/staff member at Gaylord?

I was lucky to have not one, but TWO incredible mentors during my years at Gaylord: Scott Hodgson and former Dean Joe Foote. Scott taught a majority of my classes and consistently encouraged me to go rattle the stars with all my crazy ideas. Under his tutelage, I became a better writer, a better editor and a better producer. Dean Foote was my Gaylord Yoda. He was always available for professional and personal advice. He gave me opportunities to be a leader, and helped cultivate a self-assuredness and assertiveness that people 10 years ago would have called a woman "bossy" for. And, as I learned during a study abroad program, Joe plays a mean game of lawn bowling.

How did your career path lead you to NBC?

I call my journey to NBC a series of fortunate events. In my final senior semester at Gaylord, I was applying for graduate programs at film schools in Los Angeles, and for jobs at film houses on both coasts. I was applying for a job at Universal Pictures on the NBC website when I stumbled across a posting for a year-long fellowship in the news division. I grew up in a news family -- my dad is a retired Navy Admiral and served in various senior leadership and public affairs positions at the Pentagon and with the Joint Chiefs - - so I had a healthy respect and interest in national and global affairs. I didn't quite have the major or vast internship experience they were looking for. I applied anyway. Months went by. I forgot about it. I got into film school. And the day I was about to send in my deposit, I got an email from NBC saying I was one of 50 finalists for the fellowship and asking to schedule a phone interview. It was three full months after I initially applied. I did a phone interview. I was flown to New York to do three in-person interviews with various people and panels. And before I left that day, I was offered the job. The rest, as they say, is history.

Describe your role at the TODAY Show.

I've got to be honest ... I'm not quite sure how to answer this! My formal title is producer, but TODAY is a behemoth

across the board. When I decided on my BEM track, I was offered a world of opportunities. Internships, school-run productions, electives that included work with real clients -- all of it gave me a strong foundation built on skills, work ethic and sense of self. When I first started working, I had so many bosses and colleagues surprised at my professionalism and how "together" I had it for someone so young. That's thanks in large part to the mentors, professors, contacts and opportunities Gaylord gave me.

What advice would you give to current students aspiring to a career in mass communication?

Professionally -- take advantage of every involvement opportunity you can manage with your class load. Dip your toe into all of the things I listed in my last answer, and go into the job market with a robust, healthy foundational skill set. Take digital media classes. Viewer habits are evolving. As Millennials and Gen Z get older, we're seeing those viewer habits shift from traditional broadcast to the digital space. If you have any opportunity to learn digital media skills and storytelling, take them. Personally -- do your market research into salaries, benefits and the cost of living in the job market you want to move to. Find someone who will be straight with you about the numbers of it all. I know this is a decidedly *unglamorous* thing to do, but scoring a job you love but on a salary you don't will slowly make you love the job less and less. Financial stability is so important once you're out in the wild. Make sure you've armed yourself with all necessary numbers knowledge so you're entering the job market eyes wide open.

What do you do for fun outside of work?

I've always been active (I was a scholarship athlete at OU!), and that's still my favorite way to recalibrate after a long day. I've boxed for years. If it's been a day, I'll take a long walk home through Central Park instead of the subway. New York City has so many amazing outdoor pop-up yoga and dance and HIIT classes, so I try to take advantage of those when I can. I'm a huge reader. I love to cook. This is starting to sound like a dating profile! The Big Apple is an abundance of riches, and I try to soak in all it has to offer when I can. Museums, live music,

of a show. We produce four hours of live TV every day and topics range from politics to finance to fashion to cooking segments to 5 Products To Help You Sleep Better & Cure Your Pandemic Insomnia. She's got range. And the same is expected of the show's producers. I spend most of my time working in two very different worlds: the breaking news space, and big special events or network-wide initiatives. I've produced interviews and features with world leaders, first ladies and famous public figures. I've produced in-studio breaking news and special reports. I've produced Olympics and Inaugurations and TODAY Halloween shows and Macy's Thanksgiving Day parades and TODAY's Royal Wedding coverage. But I've also produced segments about healthy financial habits, the hottest spring trends, the best books you'll want to read this fall and TikTok therapy. *Range.*

karaoke, restaurants, wacky tours -- all of it.

Are there any other organizations or projects you're involved with outside of your full-time job that you want to highlight?

There are a few AAPI and Asian Pacific American groups I'm involved in both in and out of work. I've spent a good chunk of my career mentoring Asian American high school and college students. I use my privileged position as a TODAY producer to amplify Asian American stories as often as I can - a calling that feels especially urgent and poignant given the horrific attacks against Asians throughout the pandemic. Asian Americans are no stranger to racism in this country, but the last year has been especially tough. I hope if you ever witness an injustice, you use your power to be an active ally and intervene. If you don't know where to start, google Bystander Intervention Training. Let's commit to rebuilding a society we're proud of.



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