



Ryan Welton, '92
Director of Digital Content,
Griffin Communications

For Ryan Welton, the skills he learned at the University of Oklahoma have been beneficial across mediums. Welton, a 1992 journalism graduate who minored in Spanish, started at OU with an emphasis in radio and TV before switching to a public relations emphasis. Throughout his career, he has filled roles for newspapers, TV and corporate communications, now overseeing digital content efforts for Griffin Communications. Welton recently shared how his time on campus prepared him for his professional life, what his day-to-day tasks look like, career moments that stand out to him and more.

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

I was only a bit player on the Oklahoma Daily staff, but I loved my time on the campus newspaper. After a semester as a general assignment reporter, I worked the police beat and then the city

Communications' marketing department to make sure what we do digitally - and especially on social - fits our corporate brand, to keep Oklahomans safe, informed and entertained. Day to day, I'm steeped in breaking news, weather coverage and digital content growth strategies for our sites, news apps, streaming apps, search and social.

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

The decision to move back into journalism in 2005 after a decade out of it was the single best decision I've made in terms of my career. There have been several significant moments since including being part of Hurricane Katrina coverage, the May 2013 tornado outbreak, pretty much anything that happened in 2020, including the COVID-19 pandemic -- all in an effort to grow the stature of digital journalism in a way that still serves the viewer. I'm

beat. The education I got day-to-day there under the guidance of Andy Rieger was irreplaceable, and I was privileged to work on a paper with really talented journalists.

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

Two of them. The first is everybody's favorite from the 1980s, the great Mack Palmer. His stories and the way he told them with dry, dry humor made a huge impact on the young college students who took his intro class. The other is Bob Sands, who taught a radio editing class. He spent a lot of extra time with students, and he even went way out of his way to help a buddy and I with a music recording project.

How did your career path lead you to Griffin Communications?

After a couple of newspaper jobs in southeast Oklahoma and Texas, I moved to the world of technical writing and eventually website building. The dot-com era of the late 1990s and early 2000s was quite exciting, and so was the development of news online. Newspapers, local and national TV and others were building sites and reporting news. I grew fascinated with this merger of my two professional paths, journalism and tech. In 2005, I found my way back into journalism with KOCO-TV in Oklahoma City and led their digital content operations for eight years. And then, 32 years after earning my degree in public relations, I entered the world of corporate communications with the fine folks at Love's Travel Stops & Country Stores. However, in 2017, I landed a chance to join Griffin Communications where I lead a team of eight digital producers at News 9 in Oklahoma City and News On 6 in Tulsa.

Describe your role at Griffin Communications.

Much like TV news operations have news directors, I'm that role for what we do digitally at News 9 and News On 6. I work alongside our TV news directors to make sure that what we do digitally is in sync with our television efforts but also supportive of them as well. I also work closely with Griffin

most passionate about being an evangelist for digital news at the local level. Not to sound like a planned advertisement, but getting the invitation to join the JayMac board was also significant because it reignited my relationship with the University of Oklahoma and helped me develop several new friendships and working relationships, which are extraordinarily important.

How did Gaylord College prepare you for your future career?

Being a part of the Oklahoma Daily, as it was called at the time, was the single-best move I made as a student because it was fantastic real-world experience.

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

My advice would be to not wait to start that career. Build your personal brand through digital content and social media now, and learn to manage that brand through a constant process of self-editing, especially in a world where the "internet is forever." Learn how to write, especially for print. It's a lost art.

What do you do for fun outside of work?

I love to read, especially newspapers and books about journalism, political science and history. I enjoy creating digital content in my spare time; it's a fantastic way to learn. But most of all, I love traveling and spending time with my wife, Kristi.

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

Getting to work alongside Lee (Reynolds), Sundee (Busby) and the rest of the JayMac Alumni Association is something I especially enjoy because it's a chance for me to give back to OU journalism graduates.

If you'd like to connect or discuss something related to digital, I'm always available to you. Feel free to connect with me on LinkedIn or message me at ryanwelton@gmail.com.



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