

JayMac

Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication Alumni Association



GAYLORD ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

“Don’t be afraid to take a risk and work on a project that is outside of your comfort zone. You won’t learn unless you’re trying new things.”

SIERRA SANDERS

Motion Graphics Controller, ESPN
Bristol, CT

What Sierra Sanders may lack in experience, she makes up for in persistence. A recent Gaylord grad (2017) in creative media production, Sierra pursued her passion with single-minded focus until she landed a job at ESPN in her first year out of college. We asked her about that intense job hunt as well as her time at Gaylord.

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

My favorite memory at Gaylord College is from my senior year when the Today show came in for Rokerthon. I had the privilege to be very involved in that process, and though it was stressful and exhausting, the experience was invaluable. From creating the audition video, to preparing props for the day-of, to running around campus to tape the feature the Today show produced, everything was so fun and provided such a good experience.

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

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

After I interned in Los Angeles, I was job searching for five months. I applied to 83 jobs in this time. I was still talking to ESPN recruiters, but things weren't really working out yet... I was hopeful about ESPN, but I also was afraid to put all my eggs in a corporate basket. I absolutely do not recommend that other people apply to that many jobs because it was disappointing, discouraging and I felt more and more down on myself with each rejection I received and each interview I felt that could have been better. I include this as a most significant moment, because it was in that time span that I had to be resilient, stay positive, and continue to fight for what I wanted. I believe that period of life helped me grow and helped show me who I am as a person and a young professional. Sometimes life is hard and your career doesn't seem to be going in the direction you want, but you cannot give up.

Well, I don't want anyone to be jealous of my answer...but I would have to say one of the professors I learned from the most is Scott Hodgson. Scott treats his students as professionals. His classes and his teaching style provide plenty of hands-on experiences and help students develop their creative process. I took as many classes with Scott as possible so I could continue to add tools to my arsenal.

Describe your role at ESPN.

My role at ESPN is in graphics playout. I build studio elements, transitions, and double-check graphics before they go to air. It is my job to physically load and play graphics to go out to the world. In my role, we have to be very vigilant to changes happening in the show we are working on. We constantly have to be listening to our directors and associate directors and anticipating the next element in the show.

How did your career path lead you to ESPN?

That's a really crazy question. In college, I worked as a student worker for Sooner Sports TV at SoonerVision. I primarily worked as a Graphics Operator for live games and studio shows, and as a Big Screen Operator for in-venue live events. I worked at SoonerVision all four years of college. The summer before my senior year, I had the opportunity to be a runner for ESPN at the Women's College World Series in Oklahoma City. That experience was phenomenal and helped me realize that ESPN is where I wanted to be. Additionally, I was involved with Oklahoma's chapter of the Association of Women in Sports Media. These experiences and organizations led me to apply for the AWSM internship and scholarship program my senior year. I didn't get the AWSM internships with ESPN, however, I made a contact with a Disney Intern Recruiter and eventually was offered an internship with ESPN in Los Angeles as a video editor. At the end of my internship, I applied and interviewed for a position at the Main Campus in Bristol, Conn. There wasn't a space available for me at the time so I returned to Oklahoma to work as a Freelance Professional at SoonerVision. Upon my return, I helped train and

Some other key moments:

- Both phone calls I have received informing me that my dream company would like to offer me a position. Plus the interviews that happened before that I was so nervous for.
- The first day of Intro to Mass Communication when Prof. Pritchard let us out early to go to the Gaylord Involvement Fair and I learned about SoonerVision.
- The day I interviewed at SoonerVision and Craig Moran offered me a job.
- The day in high school I helped our AV teacher film something and he said I was a natural, so I joined Broadcasting Club.

What advice would you give to current students aspiring to a career in sports media production?

1. Don't be afraid to take a risk and work on a project that is outside of your comfort zone. You won't learn unless you're trying new things.
2. If you mess up, do what you can to better the situation, take a deep breath, and leave it at the door at the end of the day/moment.
3. Treat everyone you meet with respect and work hard no matter who is watching. You might see another peer and think it's okay if they see you slacking... but someone later may ask that peer about your work ethic/abilities, and their evaluation of you is going to make a difference.
4. Your attitude affects those around you. Try to keep a good one when you're working long, miserable hours.
5. If you are going to complain, do it to someone who can fix the situation.

What do you do for fun outside of work?

New England is much more compact than Oklahoma, so I visit surrounding states and cities (mostly Boston and New York). I

established standard operating procedures and guidelines for Sooner Sports TV's upgrade to VizRT graphics system, which is utilized at ESPN. During this time, I stayed in contact with corporate recruiters at ESPN until a position became available that I was interested in and was suitable for both parties. I pretty much networked and searched for "ins" and wouldn't budge once I found them.

have friends and family who come into town to visit. I only work four days a week, and flights to Tampa are cheap, so I have gone to visit my significant other and his family. We've been to SeaWorld since I moved here, and full-time Disney employees get free admission to the parks, so we have done that. I go to the movies often and sometimes I explore Connecticut's state parks. And the rest of the time, I stay home. It's nice to not always have to be doing something. I also am joining my local library for when the snow falls here and leaving my house is more difficult.



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