

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

By

Hugh J. Martin, Tudor Vlad and Lee B. Becker

hjmartin@uga.edu, tvlad@uga.edu, lbbecker@uga.edu

James M. Cox Jr. Center for International Mass Communication Training and Research
Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602

Presented to the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research at the annual conference, November 2002, Chicago.

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

Trade publications offer conflicting views on the future and effectiveness of mass media unions. Recent strikes by unionized newspaper journalists (Wenner, 2001) and unionized television technicians (McClellan, 1998) highlighted declining membership and difficulties negotiating with management. A union has made progress, however, in efforts to outlaw contract restrictions that keep broadcast journalists from working for competing stations (Trigoboff, 1998).

One group of critical importance to the future of mass communication unions is young workers just beginning their careers. Unions need support from new workers to survive. Communication workers also have the potential to greatly influence how unions are presented to the larger public.

Union membership among working journalists declined from 29% in 1971 to 17% in 1982-1983, according to one survey (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986, p. 107). A second survey of journalists in 1992 showed the percentage of union members was unchanged (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996, p. 130). Neither survey asked for opinions about unions or workplace rights. The surveys also did not include mass communication workers in fields such as advertising and public relations.

This study reports on how young workers throughout the mass communications field view unions. The study reports results from a national survey of 2,892 journalism and mass communication graduates conducted as they entered the labor market. The questionnaire asked about unions and workplace rights. Responses are compared with data from national polls of the general population.

Responses are also analyzed in the context of more general studies of how students and young workers view unions (see, e.g. Barling, Kelloway, & Bremermann, 1991; Dekker, Greenberg, & Barling, 1998; Hester & Fuller, 1999; LaHuis & Mellor, 2001; Lowe & Rastin, 2000; Willoughby & Barclay, 1986; Willoughby & Keon, 1985). Previous research (Gomez, Gunderson, & Meltz, 2002; Lowe & Rastin, 2000) suggests the students are making a critical transition into the workforce, and their early experiences will strongly influence their views of unions.

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

Family Influences on Student Attitudes

Research suggests that students and young employees have attitudes about unions that are different from older adults (Bamberger, Kluger, & Suchard, 1999, p. 725; Gomez, Gunderson, & Meltz, 2002; Lowe & Rastin, 2000; Waddington & Whitston, 1997, p. 526-527). Older adults tend to have stable views of unions (Gomez et al., 2002, p. 525-526). Young workers have elastic views of unions that are influenced by their early experiences in the workforce (Gomez et al., 2002, p. 526-527; Lowe & Rastin, 2000, p. 209)

Experiments with undergraduates identified two primary influences on student views of unions. The first, and strongest, is family socialization. The second is beliefs about how much power workers should have in the workplace.

Barling et al. (1991) studied 143 undergraduates and 59 high school students in Canada. The study found that, "Students' attitudes toward unions were predicted by their perceptions of their parents' union attitudes" (p. 728). Results also showed student perceptions of their parents' participation in union activities predicted student attitudes.

Subsequent studies of undergraduates in Canada concluded parental influence was stronger when students identified more with their parents (Kelloway, Barling, & Agar, 1996, p. 414), and that students appear to accurately report parental attitudes and activities when those reports are compared with reports from parents (Kelloway & Watts, 1994, p. 633). A study of 339 students at a U.S. university also concluded family socialization was the strongest influence on union attitudes (Fuller & Hester, 1997, p. 1329), but the relationship was weaker than the original study (Barling et al., 1991).

Three of the four studies also examined the influence of student beliefs about work. Marxist work beliefs assert "workers should have a greater span of control over the workplace as a means of avoiding exploitation and alienation" (Barling et al., 1991, p. 726). Humanistic work beliefs stress the importance of individual growth and meaningful work. Both beliefs are compatible with unions.

Barling et al. (1991, p. 729) concluded Marxist and humanistic work beliefs do influence student attitudes toward unions. Two other studies concluded Marxist beliefs predict student union attitudes

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

(Fuller & Hester, 1997, p. 1329; Kelloway & Watts, 1994, p. 633). Fuller and Hester (1997, p. 1329) did not find, however, that humanistic beliefs predict union attitudes. Kelloway and Watts (1994) did not measure humanistic beliefs.

Fuller and Hester (1997, p. 1329) also reported regressions in their study explaining 41% of the variance in student union attitudes, in contrast to 72% in the original study (Barling et al., 1991, p. 720). "The relative importance of family socialization variables and work-belief variables in predicting general attitudes toward unions, however, was similar across the U.S. and Canadian samples" (Fuller & Hester, 1997, p.1329). The study suggested differences in the strength of the relationships may arise from a less hostile climate toward unions in Canada.

These studies suggest family socialization is an important influence on student views of unions. Kelloway and Watts (1994, p. 633) found, however, that Marxist work beliefs among students in their sample were independent of parental influences, suggesting students also develop their own ideas about unions.

Socialization and beliefs also may influence majors that students select. For example, mass communication students can major in print or broadcast journalism, in advertising, or in public relations. Those whose background and beliefs emphasize the importance of financially rewarding careers might be more inclined to major in subjects such as advertising or public relations. Students who place more emphasis on social ideals might be more inclined to major in print or broadcast journalism.

Geography may also affect student views of unions. These differences may not just be national. For example, unions have a stronger presence in some regions of the United States than in others. Students in some northern and midwestern states might have more exposure to positive ideas about unions than students in some southern states.

Classroom and Student-work Influences

Fuller and Hester (1997, 1328) used upper-level students in a management course for their experiment. The Canadian studies used students in introductory psychology classes (Kelloway et al.,

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

1996, p. 414; Kelloway & Watts, 1994, p. 631) or included high school students in the sample (Barling et al., 1991, p. 727).¹ This raises the possibility that differences in results may reflect differences in the college experience of students in these studies.

Other studies have examined whether student experiences in college are correlated with attitudes about unions. Willoughby and Barclay (1986) examined differences in union attitudes across student majors. The study surveyed 236 juniors and seniors at a university in the United States (p. 224). Students were in liberal arts, education, nursing, health sciences and management. The survey used seven scales to measure attitudes toward unions, union effectiveness, union leaders, and national and local unions (p. 225). Predictions that education and nursing students would tend to be pro-union, while management students would be anti-union, were not supported. Instead "all the groups were, on the average, neutral in their opinions about unions" (Willoughby & Barclay, 1986, p. 229).

A second study (Willoughby & Keon, 1985) with the same attitude measures examined whether students in a collective bargaining course changed their views of unions. Students completed questionnaires at the start and end of the term, and responses were compared with students in a business policy class (p. 232-234). "Participants in the collective bargaining course (as compared to students in the policy course) developed significantly more positive attitudes toward unions..." (Willoughby & Keon, 1985, p. 236). Student attitudes toward collectivism and the economic impact of unions, however, were not changed by the collective bargaining class, perhaps because they represented "deep-seated social values...not easily changed" (p. 237).

A third study (Dekker et al., 1998) examined how student experiences in part-time jobs influence union attitudes. Pro-union attitudes in adults are associated with low-skilled, repetitive work and with dissatisfaction with supervisors (p. 50). The study (Dekker et al., 1998, p. 50) examined whether similar experiences – along with co-worker satisfaction among peer sensitive students -- influenced union attitudes using a sample of 126 students 15 to 21 years old. The students were attending high school or the first year of a university. Regression analysis showed that "family socialization, particularly family

¹ This study did not report what class undergraduates were enrolled in (Barling et al., 1991, p. 727).

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

attitudes, contributed the greatest amount of variance to general union attitudes" (Dekker et al., 1998, p. 53). Student attitudes were not influenced by the quality of their part-time jobs or satisfaction with their supervisors. The study suggested students place little importance on part-time jobs that they do not expect to keep after graduating.

These studies suggest direct exposure to information about unions and collective bargaining may influence student attitudes. Most students, however, are likely to have neutral attitudes about unions, regardless of major. This could be mitigated by exposure to ideas about or associated with unions in the classroom. For example, print and broadcast journalism students have been taught to value editorial independence, which is traditionally associated with worker autonomy in news organizations. Advertising students or public relations students may be less likely to encounter such ideas.

Unformed Attitudes

The finding (Willoughby & Barclay, 1986) that students were generally neutral about unions regardless of major is consistent with more general studies of younger workers (Gomez et al., 2002; Lowe & Rastin, 2000). These studies also suggest that younger workers tend to be neutral in their attitudes toward unions. The studies (Gomez et al., 2002; Lowe & Rastin, 2000) examined how workplace experiences influence younger workers' attitudes toward unions.

Lowe and Rastin (2000) conducted a four-year panel study of students in Canada as they entered the workforce. Survey data were collected each year from 1985 to 1989 (p. 207). The baseline survey in 1985 included 836 high school students, with an average age of 18, and 769 university students, with an average age of 24. The final panel included 44% of the high school students and 66% of the university students who continued to respond to surveys in the next three years (p. 207). About 6% of the high school cohort and 19.6% of the university cohort were members of a union in 1986 (p. 210).

Most of the panel members who were not in a union -- 51.5% of the university cohort and 65% of the high school cohort -- were neutral about joining a union (p. 210). Three years later the percentage of neutral respondents had decreased to about 21% for the university cohort and 30% for the high-school cohort. Comparisons between males and females showed higher percentages of females in both cohorts

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

were neutral about unions in 1986. By 1989, higher percentages of females favored joining a union. The study concluded, "It is clear that 'fence sitting' on union support is pervasive in both groups immediately following completion of high school or university, but that positions solidify in the space of three years" (p. 209). Several factors influenced changes in attitudes. First, was experience in the labor market. University graduates who had four to six jobs from 1985 to 1989 "were more pro-union than were their counterparts with greater job stability" (p. 213-214). Graduates with involuntary part-time work or temporary jobs also tended to support joining unions. Regression analysis showed that prior union membership had a weak, positive impact on willingness to join a union. A collective orientation, defined as believing people should stick together to advance their interests, was "the strongest predictor of willingness to join on both panels" (Lowe & Rastin, 2000, p. 216). University graduates with an individualist orientation, defined as believing people are poor because of a lack of effort, were not likely to join unions.

A second study (Gomez et al., 2002) examined how interactions between family influences and early workplace experiences affect the "malleable" (p. 525) preferences of young workers. The study used data from a survey of 1,057 respondents 25 and older, and 147 respondents who were 24 or younger (p. 531). Decomposition analysis – an econometric technique -- was used to separate influences on union preferences. This technique identified correlations between social influences and the probability a respondent preferred union membership (p. 526-527).

Results showed family and friends had more influence on union preferences among younger workers than on older workers (p. 533). Beliefs in standardized pay instead of merit pay, and in more political power for employees, also had more influence on union preferences among younger workers (p. 536). Young workers also were more likely than older workers to prefer unions if they perceived unfair treatment of employees (p. 537). Young workers were influenced by the lack of practices such as self-directed work teams and employee involvement programs, but this had "no effect on the [union] preferences of adults" (p. 537). Gomez et al. (p. 538) also found that young females had stronger preferences for unions than young males, a result that is consistent with the study by Lowe and Rastin

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

(2000). Gomez et al. (p. 538) reported union membership is associated with stronger unionization preferences among both younger and older workers.

The study (Gomez et al., 2002, p. 539) concluded young workers have stronger preferences for unions than older workers because youths want unions to deal with workplace issues. However, substitutes for unions such as progressive human relations practices “also have a powerful effect on young workers preferences for unionization” (p. 539). A substantial number of young workers also said they did not know if collective or individual workplace solutions were better, whether employees were treated unfairly, or if they were protected by workplace law. “This highlights the substantial number of youths who could be persuaded into individual or collective solutions ... to deal with such workplace issues” (Gomez et al., 2002, p. 539).

A third study (Waddington & Whitston, 1997) examined why people join unions when membership is declining. The survey of union members in Great Britain between 1991 and 1993 included 1,048 respondents 20 or younger, and 1,939 respondents 21 to 25 years old (p. 519). Respondents were given a list of reasons for joining a union and asked to specify one or two (p. 520-521). The highest percentage of workers cited the mutual support offered by unions as a reason to join, with improved pay and working conditions ranked second (p. 526-527). Workers 25 and younger, however, put more emphasis on mutual support than older workers. Waddington and Whitston (p. 535) also reported that younger workers were more insecure, and less likely to make contact with a union. Younger workers instead tended to comply when recruited by shop-stewards.

These studies are consistent with findings that student attitudes about unions are influenced by families, but still largely unformed. The studies suggest, however, that the neutral views held by many students are strongly influenced by dynamic interactions with the job market and in the workplace. As students make the transition from school to work, they seek stable jobs where they are treated fairly and given a voice in the workplace. Students, especially those with a collective orientation or beliefs in workers' rights, may adopt pro-union attitudes if these expectations are not met.

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

The current study captures mass communication students at the cusp of this transition. As noted earlier, journalism students are more likely to have been exposed to lessons about the importance of employee rights with regard to editorial independence. The ability to make decisions is also important for journalists. Advertising and public relations students, however, may also consider individual decision making important. Therefore, the effect of major on views of unions may not be strong.

Union Instrumentality

Correlations between workplace conditions and union attitudes among students and young workers are consistent with the concept of union instrumentality. Union instrumentality is the ability of unions to help improve working conditions for their members (Hester & Fuller, 1999, p. 396). Instrumentality affects traditional conditions, such as wages and benefits, and non-traditional conditions such as job satisfaction. (Bamberger et al., 1999, p. 305; Tan & Aryee, 2002, p. 716). Tan and Aryee argue union instrumentality “reflects an economic model of trade unionism” (p.716) that focuses on how effectively unions address workplace concerns.

Fuller and Hester (1999) studied student perceptions of union instrumentality to determine if family socialization influenced those perceptions. The study examined correlations between what students thought their parents believed about union instrumentality, and the students' own perceptions of instrumentality (p. 397). Results showed that student perceptions of union instrumentality are mediated by parental perceptions of instrumentality. If parents perceive unions as instrumental, this strengthens the influence their participation in unions has on student attitudes about unions.²

Another study of students (LaHuis & Mellor, 2001, p. 664-665) went beyond the concept of instrumentality to identify positive and negative dimensions of beliefs about unions. Pro-union attitudes included (a) beliefs that unions can improve worker participation and treatment, and other intrinsic factors,

² Parental perceptions of union instrumentality were a mediating variable in a regression equation that used student perceptions of instrumentality as the dependent variable. When the mediating variable was included in the equation, it increased the beta weight for a second independent variable, parents' participation in unions (Hester & Fuller, 1999, p. 397).

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

(b) beliefs that unions can improve equality by reducing discrimination, and (c) beliefs unions can improve extrinsic conditions such as pay and job security.

Anti-union attitudes included beliefs that (a) unions create antagonism in the workplace, (b) union dues are costly for workers, (c) unions are exclusive, favoring members over non-members, and (d) that unions are corrupt (LaHuis & Mellor, 2001, p. 665). Surveys were returned by 1,245 students at an American university. Results (p. 676) showed negative attitudes about unions were negatively related to willingness to join a union, while positive attitudes were positively related to willingness to join. The study showed "union attitudes differ when positive and negative aspects are considered" (p. 676). The relationships, however, were "similar in strength" (p. 676). Negative, and positive attitudes had roughly the same influence on willingness to join even though the direction of the relationship differed.

Bamberger et al. (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of how beliefs about union instrumentality and pro-union attitudes influence union loyalty. The study used "80 samples from 59 studies" (p. 308) to estimate correlations between commitment to a union and other variables. Results showed union commitment has "two potent union-based antecedents, prounion attitudes and union instrumentality" (p. 313). Pro-union attitudes had a consistently stronger impact on commitment, perhaps because "the development of instrumentality beliefs... serve as the foundation upon which prounion attitudes are built" (p. 314).

Bamberger et al. (p. 315) argued that young workers, near the bottom of the pay scale, may be more concerned than older workers with economic needs. For younger workers, union instrumentality may be more important than general attitudes about unions. Instrumentality may also be more important for white-collar, professional workers because unionization is just one of several strategies available for protecting their interests (p. 315).

Tan and Aryee (2002, p. 717-718) replicated this study with a sample of 322 unionized employees in Singapore. Tan and Aryee included measures of union citizenship, or participation in unions (p. 718). Results were consistent with Bamberger et al. (1999), and showed that union loyalty predicts union citizenship (Tan & Aryee, 2002, p. 718).

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

Both studies (Bamberger et al., 1999; Tan & Aryee, 2002) found an ambiguous relationship between union commitment and job satisfaction. Bamberger et al. (1999, p. 314) reported the fit of their model improved when job satisfaction was eliminated.

Tan and Aryee (2002, p. 720) found that job satisfaction was indirectly related to union commitment. Satisfaction had a direct, positive relationship with organizational commitment. Organizational commitment was positively related to union loyalty (p. 720). Tan and Aryee (p. 719) suggested the climate of industrial relations moderates the influence of job satisfaction on union loyalty. Employees may feel obliged to commit to both an organization and the union when needs such as wages and working conditions are satisfied. But if relations are adversarial, employees may rely on the union to satisfy instrumental needs instead of committing to the organization.

The concept of instrumentality and its relationship to satisfaction is consistent with a general economic model linking the presence of unions to the size of organizations. Wunnava and Ewing (2000, p. 48-49) summarize this model, which argues unions are more likely to target larger firms because they have more workers than smaller firms. A "larger worker pool allows more workers to be solicited into entering the union at a lower cost to the union organizers than at a small firm" (p. 48). Larger firms will attempt to ward off this threat by increasing compensation and worker satisfaction with their jobs. In addition, there "appears to be a maximum wage for a particular job" (p. 49). Larger non-union firms will set their wages closer to this maximum than smaller firms. The result is that workers receive less benefit in the form of increased wages from unionization at larger firms, and more benefit at smaller firms.

Wunnava and Ewing (p. 48) used data from a national longitudinal survey of wages and benefits to examine whether women in larger organizations benefit from unions more than men. The union wage differential for women did increase with organizational size (p. 51). This may have been because women had less experience and were concentrated in lower-paid positions. Results also showed unions "have major impact across all establishment sizes" (p. 51) on the availability of maternity leave. Unions had a decreasing effect, however, on the availability of retirement and life insurance for both genders as organizational size increased (p. 51).

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

These studies suggest that student perceptions of union instrumentality – whether unions can help them improve working conditions – will influence attitudes about unions. Only students who develop pro-union attitudes, however, will favor unions. Whether graduates in the current study have pro- or anti-union attitudes may depend, in part, on their classroom experiences. For instance, journalism majors may develop pro-union attitudes if they are taught that unions can be instrumental in preserving editorial independence. Advertising or public relations majors might develop anti-union attitudes if they are taught that union work rules can make creative work more difficult.

Workplace experiences will also be important, particularly the value that graduates place on wages, benefits and other workplace rights. If graduates believe unions can be instrumental in enhancing those conditions, they will be more likely to develop pro-union attitudes. This may be particularly true for graduates who are dissatisfied with conditions at smaller organizations, where unions can have a larger impact, and for women at all organizations. The importance that graduates place on working conditions and workplace rights will probably have a stronger relationship to union attitudes than satisfaction with the job. This is because alternative strategies are available to graduates who want to satisfy these needs. Job satisfaction is more likely to have a stronger relationship to organizational commitment than to union attitudes.

Hypotheses

Print and broadcast journalism majors should tend to have positive views of unions when compared with advertising and public relations majors. This is because journalism majors are taught to value worker political power in order to preserve editorial independence. Journalism majors may also come from families where values compatible with unions, such as the importance of protecting worker rights, are stressed over other values such as financial rewards. Overall, graduates will generally have neutral attitudes about unions because they are just beginning to encounter workplace experiences that are important in influencing union attitudes.

There will be a negative relationship between job satisfaction and positive views of unions. The relationship between satisfaction and organizational commitment also will be negative.

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

Graduates who receive lower pay and fewer benefits will tend to favor unions more than graduates who receive higher pay and more benefits.

Graduates who are women will tend to favor unions more than graduates who are men. Graduates at smaller organizations will tend to favor unions more than graduates at larger organizations.

Graduates in regions where unions have a stronger presence will tend to favor unions more than graduates in regions where unions have a weaker presence.

Methodology

Data to test this model come from secondary analysis of the 2001 *Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates*, a standardized survey designed to monitor the employment rates and salaries of graduates of journalism and mass communication programs in the United States, including Puerto Rico. The survey also tracks the curricular activities of those graduates while in college, examines their job-seeking strategies, and provides measures of the professional attitudes and behaviors of the graduates upon completion of their college studies.

Each year a sample of schools is drawn from those listed in the *Journalism and Mass Communication Directory*, published annually by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, and *The Journalist's Road to Success: A Career and Scholarship Guide*, published by the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund, Inc. Schools list themselves in the *AEJMC Directory*. Selection of schools is probabilistic, so that those chosen represent the population of schools in the two directories. In 2001, 103 schools were drawn from the 458 unique entries of four-year programs in the U.S. in the two directories.

Administrators at the selected schools are asked to provide the names and addresses of their spring bachelor's and master's degree recipients. A questionnaire was mailed in November 2001 to all spring graduates receiving either a bachelor's or a master's degree from the selected programs. A second questionnaire was sent to nonrespondents in January 2002. A third mailing was sent in March 2002 to graduates who had not responded to the first two mailings.

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

In 2001, the survey was mailed to 7,382 individuals whose names and addresses were provided by the administrators of the 103 programs. A total of 3,112 returned the questionnaires by the end of May of 2002. Of the returns, 2,892 were from students who reported they actually had completed their degrees during the April to June 2001 period. The remaining 220 had completed their degrees either before or after the specified period, despite their inclusion in the spring graduation lists. A total of 571 questionnaires was returned undelivered and without a forwarding address. Return rate, computed as the number of questionnaires returned divided by the number mailed, was 42.2%. Return rate, computed as the number returned divided by the number mailed minus the bad addresses, was 45.7%.³ Of the 2,892 usable questionnaires, 2,739 (94.7%) were from bachelor's degree recipients and 153 were from those who received a master's degree.

The findings summarized in this report are projectable to the estimated 38,400 students who earned bachelor's degrees and the 3,240 students who earned master's degrees in academic year 2000-2001 from the 458 colleges and universities across the United States and Puerto Rico offering programs in journalism and mass communication.

Women made up 73.4% of respondents. Members of racial or ethnic minorities made up 18.1% of those returning questionnaires. These sample characteristics are similar to those in recent years. Overall, the sample reflects slightly higher return rates from women and slightly lower return rates from minorities, based on the known characteristics of the 458 schools from which the sample was drawn.⁴

³This return rate was 4.7% lower than in 2001. In general, return rates have been declining for this and other surveys. Analysis of return rates across time has not shown any linkages to the level of employment. See Lee B. Becker and Wilson Lowrey (2000), "Monitoring US journalism and mass communication labor market: findings, history and methods of an ongoing survey project," *Australian Journalism Review*, 22 (1):20-36 (available at <http://www.grady.uga.edu/annualsurveys/suprpts.htm>).

⁴Funding for the 2001 graduate survey was provided by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication, Cox Newspapers Inc., The Freedom Forum, Gannett, the Hearst Corporation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the National Association of Broadcasters, the Newsletter & Electronic Publishers Foundation, the Newspaper Association of America Foundation, The Newspaper Guild-CWA, the Scripps Howard Foundation, and the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia.

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

In the analyses that follow, the responses of the 2,093 bachelor's degree recipients who were employed when they returned the questionnaire were examined.

Measure of Union Support

Support for Unions was measured via two questions. The first question was: Do you approve or disapprove of labor unions. Response options were Approve (coded as 3), Disapprove (coded as 1) and Don't Know (coded as 2). The second question was: Would you personally like to belong to a labor union at work? Response options were Yes (coded as 3), No (coded as 1) and Don't Know (coded as 2). Responses to these two items were converted to standard deviation scores based on the mean and standard deviation of the distribution for the full sample of 2,892 graduates and summed to create an index of support for unions.

Measures of Job Reactions

Job Satisfaction was measured via three questions. The first was: Thinking about your overall job situation, including things such as wages, benefits and working conditions, would you say: Things are fine as they are (5), Small improvements are needed (4), Some improvements are needed (2), A lot of improvements are needed (1), I'm not sure (3).

The second question was: The work I do on my job is meaningful to me. Responses were: Agree (3), Neutral, not sure (2), and Disagree (1).

The third question was: All things considered (that is, thinking of the work, the opportunity for advancement, the salary, etc.), how satisfied are you with your present primary job? Responses were: Very satisfied (4), Moderately satisfied (3), Less than satisfied (2), and Very dissatisfied (1).

Responses to these three items were converted to standard deviation scores and summed to create a single index.

Organizational Commitment was measured via three items. The first two were: I am proud to be working for my firm/organization and I expect to retire with this company. Responses were: Agree (3), Neutral, not sure (2), and Disagree (1).

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

The third item was: Overall, how committed do you feel to your company? Responses were: Very committed (4), Moderately committed (3), Somewhat committed (2), and Not at all committed (1).

Responses to these three items were converted to standard deviation scores and summed to create a single index.

Occupational Commitment was measured via two items. The first was: I expect to retire with this occupation. Responses were: Agree (3), Neutral, not sure (2), and Disagree (1).

The second item was: Do you wish now that you had prepared for a career other than in journalism/communication? Responses were: Yes (1), No (3), and I never planned to go into this career (2).

Responses to these two items were converted to standard deviation scores and summed to create a single index.

Measures of Work Experiences: Individual

Employment status was measured by the following two questions: Are you currently employed? and Is your current primary job a permanent one or a temporary position, such as an internship? Responses were coded as follows: Full-time, Permanent (4), Full-time, Temporary (3), Part-time, Permanent (2), Part-time, Temporary (1).

Salary was measured via the following item: What is your current total income before taxes from your primary employer?

Benefits were measured with the following question: Listed below are benefits that some employers are able to offer to employees. Some employers pay fully or partially for these benefits. Others simply make them available to employees, who must pay on their own. Please look over the list below and then mark each item as follows: Employer pays all (4), Employer pays part (3), Benefit available, employer does not pay (2), Benefit not available (1). The listed benefits were: Basic medical coverage, Major medical coverage (Major illnesses), Dental coverage, Maternity/paternity leave, Retirement plan

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

beyond social security, Prescription drug coverage, Life insurance, Child care, and Disability insurance. Responses to the nine items were summed.

Full Compensation was measured with the following two-part question: Listed below are some things sometimes required of employees. Please look over the list and mark each item as follows: I am not required to do this (3), I must do this and I am paid or reimbursed (2), I must do this but I am NOT paid or reimbursed (1). The listed behaviors were: Use my own car while at work and Work beyond a 40-hour week.

Measures of Work Experiences: Organizational/Community

Organizational Type was measured through two questions. The first asked: Is your current, primary job (in terms of hours worked) one that involves communication activities and skills related to your area of study in college? Those who said yes were asked: Which of the following organizational classifications best describes the organization in which you are currently holding your primary occupation? Responses were coded as Not communication (1), Business Side of Communication (2) (public relations agency or department of a company, advertising agency or department of a company, educational institution, military, government agency, nonmedia corporation, other), or Journalistic (3) (newspaper, wire service, radio, television, cable, trade press, magazine, book publishing, online publishing, production).

Organizational Size was measured with this item: Approximately how many people are employed in all phases of work at your location in the company for which you work?

Community Size was determined via the following: What is the population of the metropolitan area, city or town in which you are now working (for your primary employer)? Responses were reduced to seven categories to eliminate the effects of extreme scores.

Region was measured by a recoding of the response to the following question: What are the first three digits of the postal zip code of your primary place of work? Responses were coded into Northeast (Pennsylvania, New Jersey on the south), South (Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kentucky, West Virginia,

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

Maryland and Delaware forming the western and northern borders, Midwest (the Dakotas, Nebraska and Kansas forming the western border) and West, including Alaska and Hawaii.

Measures of College Experiences

Major was measured by the question: Which one of the following communication specialties best describes the area you concentrated or majored in while you were in college? Responses were classified as (3) journalistic (news-editorial/print journalism, broadcast news/broadcast journalism, broadcast production/cinematography film, broadcast news and production combined, photojournalism, graphics/design, agricultural/technical journalism, journalism undifferentiated), (2) liberal arts (mass communication, speech/interpersonal communication, journalism teaching, mass media studies, theater, other, or (1) business (advertising, public relations, advertising and public relations combined).

Dual Major was measured via the following item: Did you take enough credit hours in an academic field other than journalism/communication that would be equivalent to a second major (10–12 courses)? Responses were coded No (1) and Yes (2).

Grade Point Average was measured with this item: What was your grade point average upon graduation for all courses taken (overall GPA)? Range of responses was from A (8) to Below C (1).

Journalistic Internships and Public Relations/Advertising Internships were measured with this question: Did you have a media-related internship, such as in newspapers, radio, TV, public relations, advertising or magazines, anytime while in college? (Circle all appropriate responses.) A journalistic internship was one at a newspaper, a radio station, a television station, a magazine or a subscription newsletter. A public relations/advertising internship was in public relations or in advertising. An individual was classified as either having had (2) or not having had (1) an internship of either type.

Campus Media Experience was measured with this item: While you were in college, did you ever work for a college publication or other campus medium? Responses were coded as No (1) and Yes (2).

Measures of Background

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

Race and ethnicity was measured by an item asking respondents to classify themselves using a variant of the census categories. The data were reduced to two categories of the variable Minority: (1) not a Minority and (2) Minority.

Sex of respondent was measured by the final question on the instrument. Males were classified as 1 and females as 2.

Findings

Only 4.1% of the 2001 graduates of journalism and mass communication undergraduate programs who were in the labor force when surveyed were members of a union (**Chart 1**). The percentages were nearly the same in 1997 and 1998, when the question on union membership also was included in the graduate survey. Nationally, 13.5% of those in the labor force are members of unions 1999 (Gallup, 2000).

The Newspaper Guild-CWA had the largest number of graduates as members among the unions representing the communication professions. Membership in unions presented a clear advantage in 2001, as it had in earlier years, in terms of salary received. Among those bachelor's degree recipients with a full-time job, median annual salary in 2001 was \$1,000 higher for those who were members of a union (**Chart 2**).

In general, the journalism and mass communication graduates seem to have rather unformed attitudes toward unions. While 37.1% approved of them, 53.8% reported they did not know if they approved or disapproved and only 9.1% disapproved (**Chart 3**). Nationally, union approval stood at 65% in August of 1999 (Gallup, 2000), with disapproval at 28%. Of the journalism and mass communication bachelor's degree recipients, 14.2% said they would like to belong to a labor union, while 55.0% said they did not know whether they wanted to belong to a union (**Chart 4**). Those who said they did not want to join a union made up 30.8% of the journalism and mass communication bachelor's degree recipients. Nationally, 21% of the population said in September of 1999 that it wanted to belong to a labor union, and 76% said it does not want to join a union (Gillespie, 1999).

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

These two items, as noted above, were used to create the index, **Support for Unions**. A simple summing of the items is shown in **Chart 5** for the bachelor's degree recipients employed at the time they completed the survey. This is the group used in the analyses that follow. Nearly half of the sample falls at the midpoint, reflecting the lack of certainty about unions for the sample. The standardized index of **Support for Unions** is shown in **Chart 6**. The standardization does improve the spread of scores in the distribution slightly, though it also increases the positive skew of the distribution. This second index is used below.

Support for Unions correlates with 11 of the 18 predictors as predicted, though the size of the relationships is very small in all cases (**Table 1**). Among the measures of reactions to the job held, **Job Satisfaction** and **Organizational Commitment** are significantly and negatively related to **Support for Unions**. Those more satisfied with their jobs and more committed to their current employer were less supportive of labor unions than where those not satisfied with the current jobs and not committed to their current employer. **Occupational Commitment** is not related to union support, suggesting that the current employment situation drives union support, not the overall assessment of one's relationship with an occupation. Four of the five measures of work experiences are correlated with **Support for Unions** as predicted. Those who held full-time, permanent jobs are less supportive of unions than are those in part-time, temporary positions. Salary is a surprisingly weak, but significant negative predictor of union support. Those employees receiving employee-paid benefits are less supportive of unions than are those with don't receive benefits or must pay for major parts of the benefit package themselves. Only the variable **Full Compensation** in this set is not related in the predicted way to **Support for Unions**. Those with full-compensation are slightly more supportive of unions than are their counterparts.

The organizational and community variables are less predictive of union support than had been expected. As expected, those working for media organizations are more supportive of unions than are those with other employers. **Organizational Size** and **Community Size** are not related to **Support for Unions**. Union support does vary by region of the country, as expected. Those graduates with jobs in the

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

northeastern part of the county show the highest levels of support, while those in the south show the least (**Chart 7**). The differences among the regions are statistically significant ($F=6.229$, $df\ 3, 1,990$, $p.<.00$).

Four of the six measures of experiences the graduates had while in college are significant predictors of support for unions (**Table 1**). In fact, at the bivariate level, **Major** is the strongest single predictor, though even that relationship is small. Those bachelor's degree recipients who had completed their studies in a journalistic or other media field were more supportive of unions than were those graduates who had not. **Dual Major** and **Grade Point Average**, who measures of the academic performance of the students regardless of field of study, are not related to **Support for Unions**. Having had a journalistic internship is positively related to union support, while having had a public relations or advertising internship is negatively related to union support. And having worked for the campus media is positively related to union support. Something in the curriculum and experiences of the students in that curriculum seems to either reinforce or shape views about unions.

Among the two background variables, only **Minority** is related to **Support for Unions**. Those graduates who are members of racial or ethnic minorities are more supportive of labor unions. Sex of the respondent makes no difference.

The variable clusters are ordered temporally, with the **Measures of Job Reactions** expected to be the consequences of the **Measures of Work Experiences**, both at the individual and at the organizational and community level, which are expected to be at least partially a response to the **Measures of College Experiences**, which might well be the consequence of the **Measures of Background**. To test the viability of this model, these five types of variables were entered into a regression model as five corresponding blocks. **Support for Unions** was the dependent variable. Only those variables shown in **Table 1** to be predictive in the expected way were included in the analysis.

As **Table 2** shows, the first block of variables, containing the **Measures of Job Reactions**, explains a significant amount of variance in **Support for Unions**, and each additional block of variables explains a significant incremental amount of variance. The final Multiple R is only .24, with the total

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

amount of variance explained less than 5%. What is most striking, however, is that college experiences and background characteristics (in this case, race/ethnicity) continue to explain variance in the level of union support even after controlling for variance explained by the job taken and the experiences on that job.

The regression analysis was repeated in each of the four regions of the country (Northeast, South, Midwest and West). The equation was most predictive in the Northeast, where the final Multiple R was .32, followed by the Midwest (Multiple R of .31), the South (Multiple R of .31) and the West (Multiple R of .18). Only in the West did the equation continue to grow in predictive power as the blocks of variables were introduced.

Summary and Conclusions

In general, the data are consistent with expectations that most graduates have yet to develop a particular view of unions because their experience in the workplace is limited. The results are also consistent with the literature's suggestions that the graduates will base their views of unions on both the experiences they have on the job and the experiences they had before they took those initial jobs. Pay, the level of benefits, and job satisfaction are all negatively related to support for unions. These findings are consistent with the literature suggesting the journalism and mass communications graduates would take a utilitarian view of unions. The graduates' views were also consistent with suggestions that those who might value workplace autonomy--journalists or journalism majors--would be more supportive of unions than those with an interest in advertising and public relations.

The negative relationship between union support and both job satisfaction and organizational commitment is of particular note. The existing literature (Bamberg et al., 1999; Tan & Aryee, 2000) reports job satisfaction has an ambiguous relationship to union support, perhaps because it is mediated by how workers view the relationship between unions and their employers. This relationship appears to be more straightforward for the journalism and mass communication graduates. If they are satisfied with their jobs and their employers, they are less interested in unions. This may in part reflect the graduates' lack of direct experience with unions. This finding is also consistent with the literature's predictions that

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

practical considerations about whether unions can improve workplace conditions will be important for students and younger workers (Bamberger et al., 1999; Fuller & Hester, 1999; Gomez et al., 2002; LaHuis & Mellor, 2001) .

Where the graduates work also mattered. Journalism and mass communication graduates working at journalistic organizations were more supportive of unions, while those working for business organizations--such as advertising and public relations firms and departments--were less supportive. This difference seems to be predated by the curricular experiences of the graduates while they were at the university. Graduates who had studied for media careers were more likely to be union supporters even after they were on the job than were those who had not. Graduates working in areas where editorial autonomy is important are more supportive of unions, a finding that is consistent with studies showing attitudes about workplace rights predict union support (Barling et al., 1991; Fuller & Hester, 1997; Kelloway et al., 1996; Kelloway & Watts, 1994).

Another notable finding was that participation in the campus media and in media internships was associated with support for unions. These university experiences are predictive of union support even after controlling for experiences on the job. This finding is again consistent with links between workplace rights and union support. The finding is not consistent, however, with Dekker et al. (1998) who reported student part-time work did not influence union attitudes. This may be because the earlier study examined the influence of jobs that were intended to provide money while students were in school. Internships and campus media jobs are not just a way to earn money; they are important learning experiences that act as gateways to permanent jobs after graduation.

The study only included two background variables suggestive of family and social support for unions, sex of the respondent and race and ethnicity. Sex made no difference in union support, contrary to earlier findings of gender differences (Lowe & Rastin, 2000; Wunnava & Ewing 2000). Graduates from racial or ethnic minorities, however, were more supportive of unions than were those not so classified. These differences held even after work experience was removed via control. This may be because members of minorities view unions as potentially helpful in curbing discrimination.

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

Regional variations were also consistent with predictions that geographic differences in attitudes about unions would make a difference. Support for unions is lowest among college graduates who took jobs in the south and greatest among those who took jobs in the northeast. This is consistent with the historical support for unions in the northeast and the lack of support in the south. The variables selected for analysis here were predictive of union support in all parts of the country except the west, where support for unions seems not to be influenced by the factors identified for analysis.

To be sure, the amount of variance in union support attributable to the identified forces is small regardless of area of the country. In the overall analysis, less than 5% of the variance in support for unions was attributable to the various factors identified here. To some extent, this may be attributable to the limited variance in support for unions among the sample--and most likely the population--singled out for analysis. Only 4.1% of the graduates were members of unions. More than half did not know when asked about union approval or if they wanted to join a union. The consequence was that the analysis was of predictors of decisions that had not yet been made. It may well be that the feelings about unions will become firmer only through additional work experience. Still those experiences are already having an effect.

The analyses are limited by imperfect measurement and incomplete sets of variables. The data were gathered for a different purpose from that of this paper. Had more refined measures of union support and of the various independent variables been possible, a more satisfying model might have been the outcome.

Despite these limitations, the data strongly suggest that journalism and mass communications graduates who had different career tracks at the university, perhaps because of different backgrounds, have different views of unions. Unions are one important element in the relations between workers and employees, so the views of these graduates may affect both how they look for jobs and how they react to their experience in those jobs. The graduates' still developing views of unions are also important because many of them will influence how the mass media communicates about unions to the public at large. Therefore, it is ironic that so little is known about the implications of the majors the graduates selected

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

and how their college experiences influenced their views. The data clearly suggest that graduates who are more interested in journalistic positions are more supportive of unions than those interested in other types of business such as public relations. The potential consequences for coverage of unions and for coverage of business seem worthy of exploration. Such coverage should ultimately have implications for how the general public feels about unions and their role in modern society.

References

- AFL-CIO, & Associates, P. D. H. R. (2001). *Workers' Rights in America*.: AFL-CIO.
- Bamberger, P. A., Kluger, A. N., & Suchard, R. (1999). The antecedents and consequences of union commitment: A meta-analysis. *Academy of Management Journal*, 42(3), 304-318.
- Barling, J., Kelloway, E. K., & Bremermann, E. H. (1991). Preemployment Predictors of Union Attitudes - the Role of Family Socialization and Work Beliefs. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76(5), 725-731.
- Dekker, I., Greenberg, L., & Barling, J. (1998). Predicting union attitudes in student part-time workers. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science-Revue Canadienne Des Sciences Du Comportement*, 30(1), 49-55.
- Gallup, G. (2000). *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1999*. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources.
- Gillespie, M. (1999), Labor Day finds continued strong support for unions. *The Gallup Poll Monthly*, 408 (September), 29-31.
- Fuller, J. B., & Hester, K. (1997). Another look at preemployment predictors of general union attitudes. *Psychological Reports*, 81(3), 1327-1330.
- Gomez, R., Gunderson, M., & Meltz, N. (2002). Comparing youth and adult desire for unionization in Canada. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 40(3), 521-542.
- Hester, K., & Fuller, J. B. (1999). An extension of the family socialization model of union attitudes. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 139(3), 396-398.
- Kelloway, E. K., Barling, J., & Agar, S. (1996). Preemployment predictors of children's union attitudes: The moderating role of identification with parents. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 136(3), 413-415.
- Kelloway, E. K., & Watts, L. (1994). Preemployment Predictors of Union Attitudes - Replication and Extension. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79(4), 631-634.
- LaHuis, D. M., & Mellor, S. (2001). Antiunion and prounion attitudes as predictors of college students' willingness to join a union. *The Journal of Psychology*, 135(6), 661-681.

Communication Entry-Level Professionals' Attitudes Toward Unions and Workplace Rights

Lowe, G. S., & Rastin, S. (2000). Organizing the next generation: Influences on young workers' willingness to join unions in Canada. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 38(2), 203-222.

McClellan, S. (1998, December 14). Union blues. *Broadcasting & Cable*, 26-28.

Tan, H. H., & Aryee, S. (2002). Antecedents and outcomes of union loyalty: A constructive replication and an extension. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(4), 715-722.

Trigoboff, D. (1998, September 21). The noncompetitive world of TV news. *Broadcasting & Cable*, 36-42.

Waddington, J., & Whitston, C. (1997). Why do people join unions in a period of membership decline? *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 35(4), 515-546.

Weaver, D. H., & Wilhoit, G. C. (1986). *The American Journalist : A Portrait of U.S. News People and Their Work*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Weaver, D. H., & Wilhoit, G. C. (1996). *The American Journalist in the 1990s : U.S. News People at the End of an Era*. Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum.

Wenner, K. S. (2001, April). Whither the Guild? *American Journalism Review*, 46-52.

Willoughby, F. G., & Barclay, L. F. (1986). College students' majors and attitudes toward unions: Sources of future union members? *Journal of Collective Negotiations*, 15(3), 223-230.

Willoughby, F. G., & Keon, T. L. (1985). Changing business students' attitudes toward unions: A significant treatment effect. *Journal of Collective Negotiations*, 14(3), 231-238.

Wunnava, P. V., & Ewing, B. T. (2000). Union-nonunion gender wage and benefit differentials across establishment sizes. *Small Business Economics*, 15(1), 47-57.

Table 1. Correlates of Support for Unions

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Job Satisfaction | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | -0.09 0.00 2043 |
| Organizational Commitment | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | -0.08 0.00 2046 |
| Occupational Commitment | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | -0.03 0.06 2032 |
| Employment Status | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | -0.09 0.00 2068 |
| Salary | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | -0.05 0.01 1980 |
| Benefits | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | -0.09 0.00 1569 |
| Full Compensation | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | 0.04 0.03 2001 |
| Organizational Type | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | 0.07 0.00 2047 |
| Organizational Size | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | -0.01 0.28 2001 |
| Community Size | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | 0.00 0.43 1704 |
| Major | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | 0.15 0.00 2062 |
| Dual Major | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | 0.00 0.49 2042 |
| Grade Point Average | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | 0.00 0.45 2064 |
| Journalistic Internships | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | 0.12 0.00 2068 |
| PR/Advertising Internships | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | -0.09 0.00 2068 |
| Campus Media Experience | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | 0.09 0.00 2068 |
| Sex | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | 0.01 0.29 2064 |
| Minority | Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N | 0.12 0.00 2052 |

Table 2. Model Summary for Regression of Support for Unions on Predictors

| Model | R | Predictors | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |
|-------|--|------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-------|---------------|
| 1 | 0.115 | a | 0.013 | 0.012 | 1.714 | 0.013 | 9.967 | 2 | 1,480 | 0.00 |
| 2 | 0.140 | b | 0.020 | 0.016 | 1.711 | 0.006 | 3.149 | 3 | 1,477 | 0.02 |
| 3 | 0.172 | c | 0.030 | 0.026 | 1.702 | 0.010 | 15.294 | 1 | 1,476 | 0.00 |
| 4 | 0.213 | d | 0.045 | 0.039 | 1.691 | 0.016 | 6.037 | 4 | 1,472 | 0.00 |
| 5 | 0.237 | e | 0.056 | 0.049 | 1.682 | 0.011 | 16.936 | 1 | 1,471 | 0.00 |
| a | (Constant), Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment. | | | | | | | | | |
| b | (Constant), Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Employment Status, Salary, Benefits. | | | | | | | | | |
| c | (Constant), Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Employment Status, Salary, Benefits, Organizational Type. | | | | | | | | | |
| d | (Constant), Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Employment Status, Salary, Benefits, Organizational Type, Major, Journalistic Internships, PR/Advertising Internships, Campus Media Experience. | | | | | | | | | |
| e | (Constant), Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Employment Status, Salary, Benefits, Organizational Type, Major, Journalistic Internships, PR/Advertising Internships, Campus Media Experience, Minority. | | | | | | | | | |