

The Effects of Pre-University Study of Journalism On Entry to the Job Market

Lee B. Becker, Donna Wilcox and Tudor Vlad

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

U.S.A.

Presented to the Journalism Research and Education Section, International Association for Media and Communication Research, Mexico City, July 21-24, 2009.

ABSTRACT

Research in the U.S. has shown that extracurricular activities at the high school level are beneficial for students. One type of extracurricular activity common in U.S. high schools is journalistic, including production of a student newspaper, involvement with student radio and television, and production of a yearbook. Little is known about the lasting effects of participation in high school extracurricular communication activities. This paper examines the impact of participation in high school extracurricular communication activities on initial success in the job market. It shows that those students who have participated in journalism activities such as working for the newspaper, radio station or television station are more likely to find jobs once they complete their university training and have more success in finding jobs in the communication field.

Research in the U.S. has shown that extracurricular activities at the high school level have proven beneficial for students. While the benefit depends on the type of activity, the research has shown that the benefits are both short-term and long-lasting. Non-academic activities such as playing sports, doing outdoor activities and participation in social groups support the development of social skills. Academic activities such as participation in math or science clubs positively affect academic performance.

One type of extracurricular activity common in U.S. high schools is production of a student newspaper, involvement with student radio and television, and production of a yearbook. Existing studies on the effects of these communication extracurricular activities support the idea that they have positive effects on student academic performance. Throughout high school and into college, students who participated in journalism activities have been shown to score higher in reading and comprehension. Other research showed that high school seniors and college freshmen who participated in school newspaper and other journalism activities made fewer errors and scored higher in all measures of information presentation and selection judgment and had higher writing scores on standardized college admission tests than students who were not involved in such activities.

Little is known about the lasting effects of participation in high school extracurricular communication activities. Research has shown, however, that many students decide to enter journalism and other communication careers in high school and that those who participate in communication activities in high school are more likely to make this decision earlier than others.

This paper examines the impact of participation in high school extracurricular communication activities on initial success in the job market. Specifically, it looks at whether those students who have participated in journalism activities such as working for the newspaper, radio station or television station are more likely to find jobs once they complete their university training and whether they have more success in finding jobs in the communication field.

General Literature on Impact of Extracurricular Activities

For most students in the United States, after school and extracurricular activities are a large part of their school careers. It is estimated that nationally 83% of students aged 6-17 participate in at least one extracurricular activity during their school career (Kennedy, 2008) . Most high school students in the US

engage in at least one school sponsored extracurricular activity, with varsity sports being the most popular (Eide & Ronan, 2001). Extracurricular and after school activities serve many purposes depending on the age group and interests of the student as well as availability at school or in the community. Researchers as well as developmentalists and youth advocates argue that organized, structured activities are good for adolescents for a variety of reasons. These include: acquiring and practicing specific social, physical and intellectual skills; positively contributing to society; getting the sense of belonging to a group; establishing supportive networks, and experiencing and dealing with challenges (Eccles et al, 2003).

Among high school students, research shows that participation in such extracurricular activities has extensive influence on development including academics. Extracurricular activities help to build a positive self image, reduce negative behavior, allow students to learn and continue to develop social skills and provide mentoring possibilities between advisors and older leaders (Zaff et al., 2003). It is also believed that experiences outside the classroom are “extensions” of what is learned inside the classroom (Kennedy, 2008). The benefits of extracurricular activities extend far past formal education, and have been shown to increase job quality, and encourage greater participation in the political process (Barber & Eccles, 1999).

While the distinctions between activities can be broad, researchers have used different classification systems to further delineate the types of non-classroom activities. Eccles et al. (2003) classify activities into the following categories: Prosocial activities; Team sports; Performing Arts; School-Involvement activities; and Academic Clubs. In their analysis of girls' academic achievement, Chambers and Schreiber (2004) categorized extracurricular activities first as in-school/out-of-school, then as organized/unorganized and academic/non academic. The reason for these extensive classifications is that it is believed by some that different types of activities influence students differently. Camp (1990) and other researchers that subscribe to the zero sum theory assert that the greater amount of time spent on non-academic activities decreases academic achievement because the amount of time spent on academic activities is decreased. School based activities, when compared to non-school-related activities, have been found to have a stronger effect for adolescents with regard to improved academic achievement (Gerber, 1996). Non-academic activities such as sports, scouting, and social groups support the

development of certain social characteristics, while academic activities like math or science club positively affect academic performance (Chambers & Schreiber, 2004; Eccles et. al, 2003; Zaff et. al, 2003).

Literature on Impact of Journalistic Extracurricular Activities

Among academic extracurricular activities are journalism or media activities such as participation in production of a yearbook, working for a newspaper or TV/radio station, taking a journalism class, or involvement with some sort of online or web journalism instruction. Journalism activities would be classified as a school-involvement activity or an in-school, organized, academic activity.

Like other academic activities, journalistic activities have been found to have positive effects on student academic performance. Studies done by Dvorak (1990, 1994, 1998) show that high school seniors and college freshman who participated in school newspaper and other journalism activities had higher GPAs, made fewer errors and scored higher on all measures of information presentation and selection judgment. They also had higher writing scores on the ACT English Assessment than students that were not involved in such activities.

Journalism activities positively affect students while in high school, as is the case for other academic activities. Effects have been found to last into college and influence career decisions. High school is considered by many to be the best place to generate interest in journalism as a career and to turn into lifelong newspaper readers, according to Castaneda (2001). Dvorak (1990) found that students who participated in a journalism activity were 10 times as likely to choose a journalism/communications major in college and pursue it as a career as other students. Results from the 1997 American Society of Newspaper Editors study found that 25% of journalists interviewed decided on their career while they were in high school (Butler, 2006).

Research has shown that the best predictors of success in the job market are participation in college media, internships, and appropriate specialization (Becker, Kosicki, Engleman & Viswanath, 1993; Becker, Lauf & Lowrey, 1999). Research also has shown consistent gaps in job market success associated with gender and racial and ethnic minority status (Becker, Vlad, Vogel, Hanisak & Wilcox, 2008), though these do not necessarily persist once controls are used for college experiences.

Research Questions and Expectations

The existing research does not address the impact of high school journalism extracurricular activity on job market success. Based on the existing research, it seems reasonable to expect that the experience of high school involvement in journalism would lead to success in actually finding jobs once the students completed their undergraduate studies. If high school extracurricular communication activities prepare the students better for university study, it should result in fuller acquisition of the university experience, which should result in greater success once the students enter the job market.

Method

To test this expectation, secondary analysis of data from the *2007 Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates* was undertaken. The *Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates* was first conducted in 1964 and has operated with a consistent methodology since 1987. It is designed to monitor the employment rates and salaries of graduates of journalism and mass communication programs in the United States, including Puerto Rico, in the year after graduation. In addition, the survey 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 Guide*, formerly published and printed by the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund, Inc. Schools list themselves in the *AEJMC Directory*. In 2007, 83 schools were drawn from the 474 unique entries of four-year programs in the U.S. (including Puerto Rico) in the two directories.

The questionnaire asked about the respondent's experiences both while a student and in the months since graduation. Included were questions about university experiences, job-seeking and employment, and salary and benefits.

In 2007, the survey was mailed to 8,129 individuals whose names and addresses were provided by the administrators of the 83 programs (Becker, Vlad, Vogel, Hanisak & Wilcox, 2008). A total of 2,455

returned the questionnaires by the middle of June of 2008. Of the 2,271 usable questionnaires, 2,112 (93.0%) were from bachelor's degree recipients and 159 were from those who received a master's degree. The return rate was 33.1% (computed as the number returned divided by the number mailed minus the bad addresses).

Findings

The 2007 class of bachelor's degree recipients entered the university with very solid high school credentials, based on their reports of high school grades. The questions on high school grades were included in previous surveys, and comparisons of reported grades across those suggest that the newest students were the best prepared—or at least received the highest grades (Chart 1).

In 2007, 83.0% of the bachelor's degree recipients reported receiving A grades in high school in English, an increase from the 2000 survey when the question was last included. A majority of the 2007 graduates also reported receiving A grades in math, and nearly three-quarter reported receiving A grades in history. Just under half reported receiving A grades in science. All three percentages are significantly higher than those reported by graduates in previous surveys. Consistent with the Dvorak studies (1990, 1994 & 1998), journalism and mass communication students, regardless of year, performed better in the humanistic part of their high school curriculum than in math and science, but A grades were common across the curriculum.

One in four of the 2007 bachelor's degree recipients was involved with his or her high school yearbook, and the same ratio was involved in the high school newspaper (Chart 2). One in 10 worked with the television or radio station, and a third took a journalism class. The 2007 graduates were less likely than the 2000 graduates to participate in the yearbook or the newspaper, but the decline is not overly great.

The high school experience is important, because most journalism and mass communication students select the major before they enter university, as Chart 3 makes clear. This finding is consistent back through 1990, when the question was first asked in the graduate survey. The percentage of bachelor's degree recipients who made the decision to study journalism and mass communication before entering the university has remained unchanged since 1995. Across all of the high school journalistic

experiences, those who participated were more likely to select journalism and mass communication as a major before entering the university than were those who did not participate (Chart 4). Of those journalism and mass communication bachelor's degree recipients who worked for the student newspaper, for example, 80% chose journalism before entering the university, while only 45.9% of those who did not work for the campus newspaper selected their major before entering the university.

The high school experience also predicts success in the job market. In 2007, those bachelor's degree recipients who participated in each of the five listed high school journalism activities were more likely to have full-time jobs when they returned the survey instrument than were those bachelor's degree recipients who had not participated in the campus journalism activity (Chart 5). With the single exception of the high school yearbook, participation in high school journalism activities also is associated with landing a communication job upon graduation (Chart 6). For example, 65.3% of those journalism and mass communication bachelor's degree recipients who took a high school journalism class reported having a job in communication when they returned the graduate survey, compared with 55.4% of those who had not taken a high school journalism class.

The time of decision to major in journalism also is important. Among the 2007 graduates, those who decided to major in journalism and mass communication before entering the university were more likely to have a full-time job when they returned the survey instrument and more likely to have a communication job than were those who had not decided on the journalism and mass communication job before entering the university (Chart 7).

With employment status and employment in communications as dependent variables, a simple regression was run with all variables to understand the influence of high school journalism participation as a predictor of success in the job market. Included in the analysis were two background variables, gender and minority status, two high school variables, high school grades and a sum of the number of high school journalistic activities participated in, time of decision to major in journalism, and three college variables, number of internships, a sum of the number of campus media participated in, and university grades (Table 8). Based on the zero-order correlations, women were more likely to be employed (0.072) and minority graduates were less likely to be employed six to eight months after graduation. High school grades are not

related to job market success, while high school participation (as shown in the earlier chart) is. Time of decision and number of internships also are related to job market success, but campus media participation is not. University grades are slightly related to job market success. Among those who found work, gender does not matter, but minority status does. High school grades matter, as does high school journalistic participation, time of degree decision, number of internships, campus media participation and university grades.

In the final regression equation for the simple employment variable, number of internships and high school media participation remain individual predictors of job market success, as do gender and minority status. In the equation for communication employment among the employed, number of internships and university grades remain significant individual predictors, as does minority status. High school journalism participation is not a predictor in this case, nor is gender.

In sum, the data show that high school journalistic participation has both a direct and indirect effect on job market success if the criterion is simply ability to find a job. It has an indirect effect through such factors as number of internships but not a direct effect for the criterion variable of landing a job in communication. High school journalistic participation had a simple correlation with number of internships at the university level of .140.

Discussion and Conclusions

Exposure to journalism at the high school level appears to have a lasting effect on students. The findings from this analysis add to, and update, the existing research on the impact of participation in high school journalism extracurricular activities. Not only does participation in such activities prepare students for college entrance exams and their undergraduate careers, results of this analysis show a significant effect on the success of the university graduates once they move into the job market. While gender and minority status also play a significant role in job market success, these are, of course, stable variable not affected by either the college or university experience. Particularly important in predicting job market success is the number of internships of the students while at the university. This is a finding consistent with earlier research on the topic.

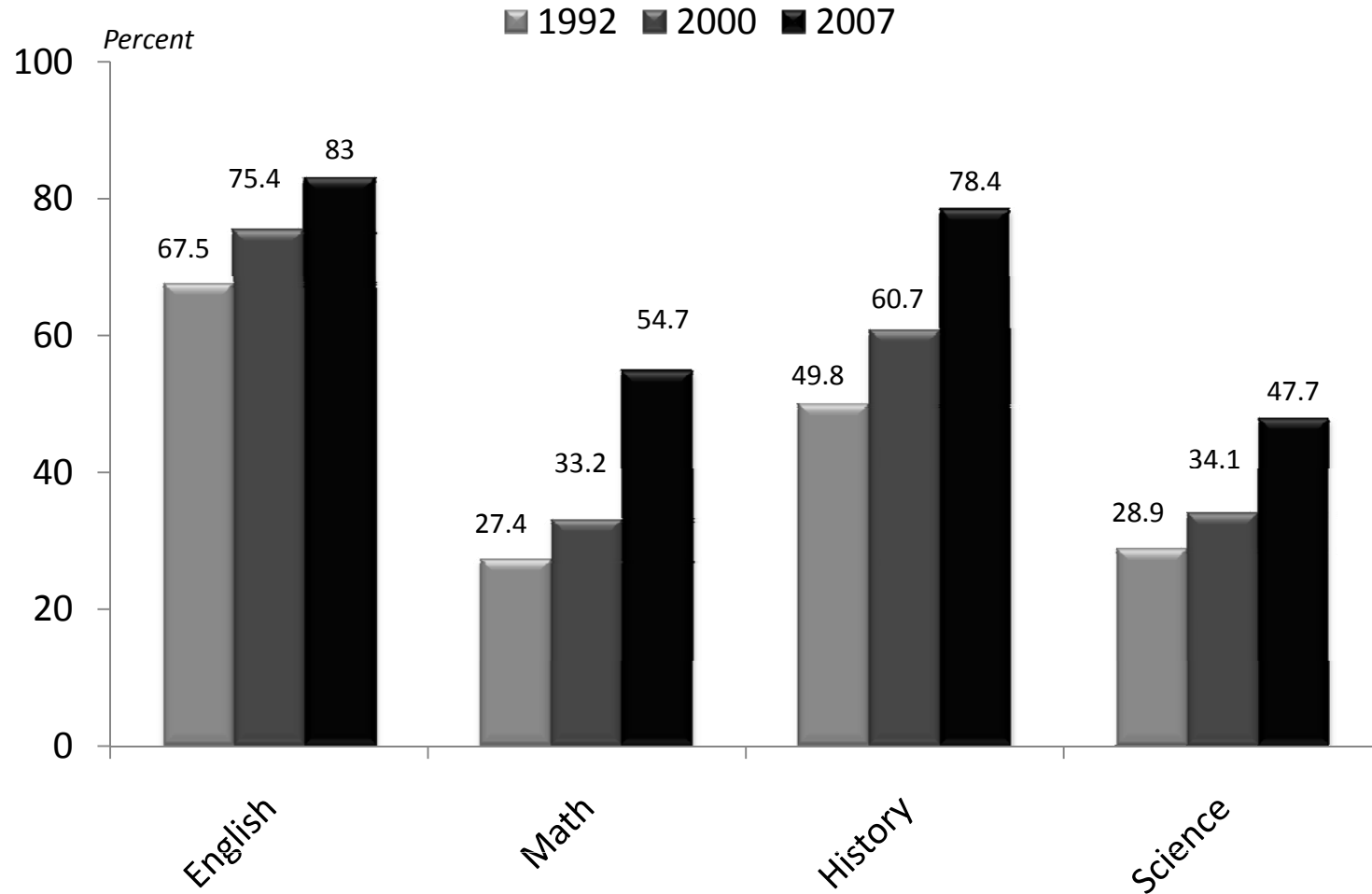
References

- Becker, L.B, G.M. Kosicki, T. Engleman, & K. Viswanath. (2003). "Finding work and getting paid: Predictors of success in the mass communications job market," *Journalism Quarterly*, 70: 919-933.
- Becker, L.B, e. Lauf, & W. Lowrey. (1999). "Differential employment rates in the journalism and mass communication labor force based on gender, race and ethnicity: Exploring the impact of affirmative action," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 76: 631-645.
- Becker, L.B, T. Vlad, M. Vogel, S. Hanisak, & D. Wilcox. (2007). *2007 Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates*.
- Butler, Kiera. (2006). The next Generation. *Columbia Journalism Review*, Vol. 44 (5), p. 38-41.
- Camp, W.G. (1990). Participation in student activities and achievement: a covariance structural analysis. *Journal of Educational Research*, 83, p. 272-278.
- Castaneda, Laura. (2001). Preview: High school journalism--'We're trying to inspire folks to believe again'. *Columbia Journalism Review*, Vol. 39 (6) p. 12.
- Chambers, E.A. & James B. Schreiber. (2004). Girls' academic achievement: varying associations of extracurricular activities. *Gender and Education*, Vol. 16,(3), p. 327-346.
- Dvorak, Jack. (1990). College students evaluate their scholastic journalism courses. *Journalism Educator*, p. 36-46.
- Dvorak, Jack. (1998). Journalism student performance on advanced placement exams. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, vol. 52(3) p. 4-12 .
- Dvorak, Jack, L. Lain & T. Dickson. (1994). Grades, ACT tests, attitudes, and involvement. Bloomington: ERIC Clearinghouse, Journalism kids do it better.
- Eccles, J., Bonnie Barber, Margaret Stone, & James Hunt. (2003). Extracurricular Activities and Adolescent Development . *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 59, (4), p. 865-889.
- Eccles, J.S. & B.L. Barber. (1999). Student Council, volunteering, basketball or marching band: What kind of extracurricular activity involvement matters? *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 14, p. 10-43.
- Eide, E.R. & Ronan, N. (2001). Is participation in high school athletics an investment or a consumption good? Evidence for high school and beyond. *Economics of Education Review*, 20, p. 431-442.
- Gerber, S.B. (1996). Extracurricular activities and academic achievement. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 30, p. 42-50.
- Kennedy, Ron. (2008). The Need for High School Extracurricular Activities. *Coach Athletic Director* p. 38-39.

Zaff, J.F., Kristin Moore, Angela Romano & Stephanie Williams. (2003). Implications of extracurricular activity during adolescence on positive outcomes. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 18, p. 599-630.

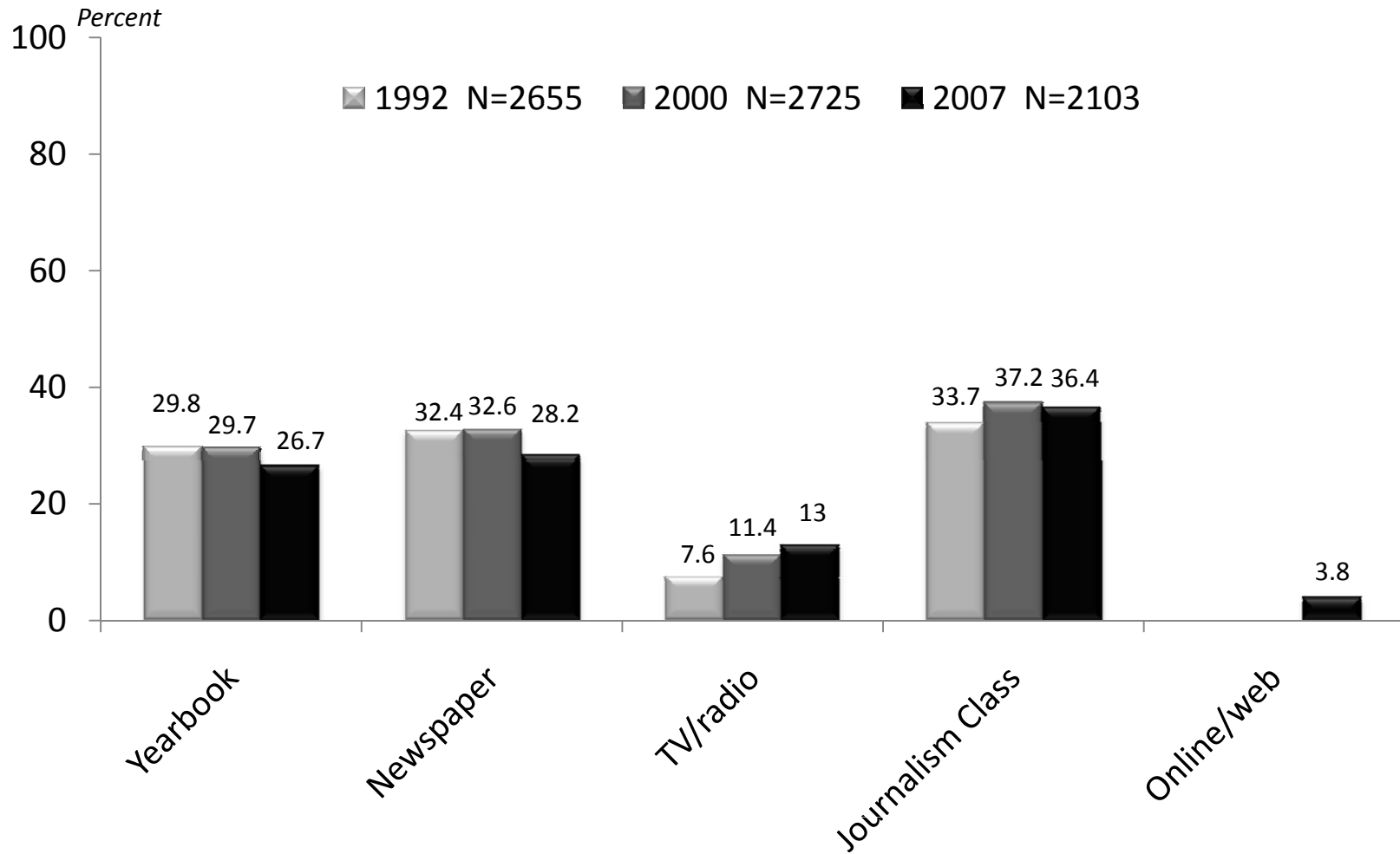
1. Grades in high school of university journalism and mass communication graduates

'A' grade in high school level English, Math, History and Science



Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates

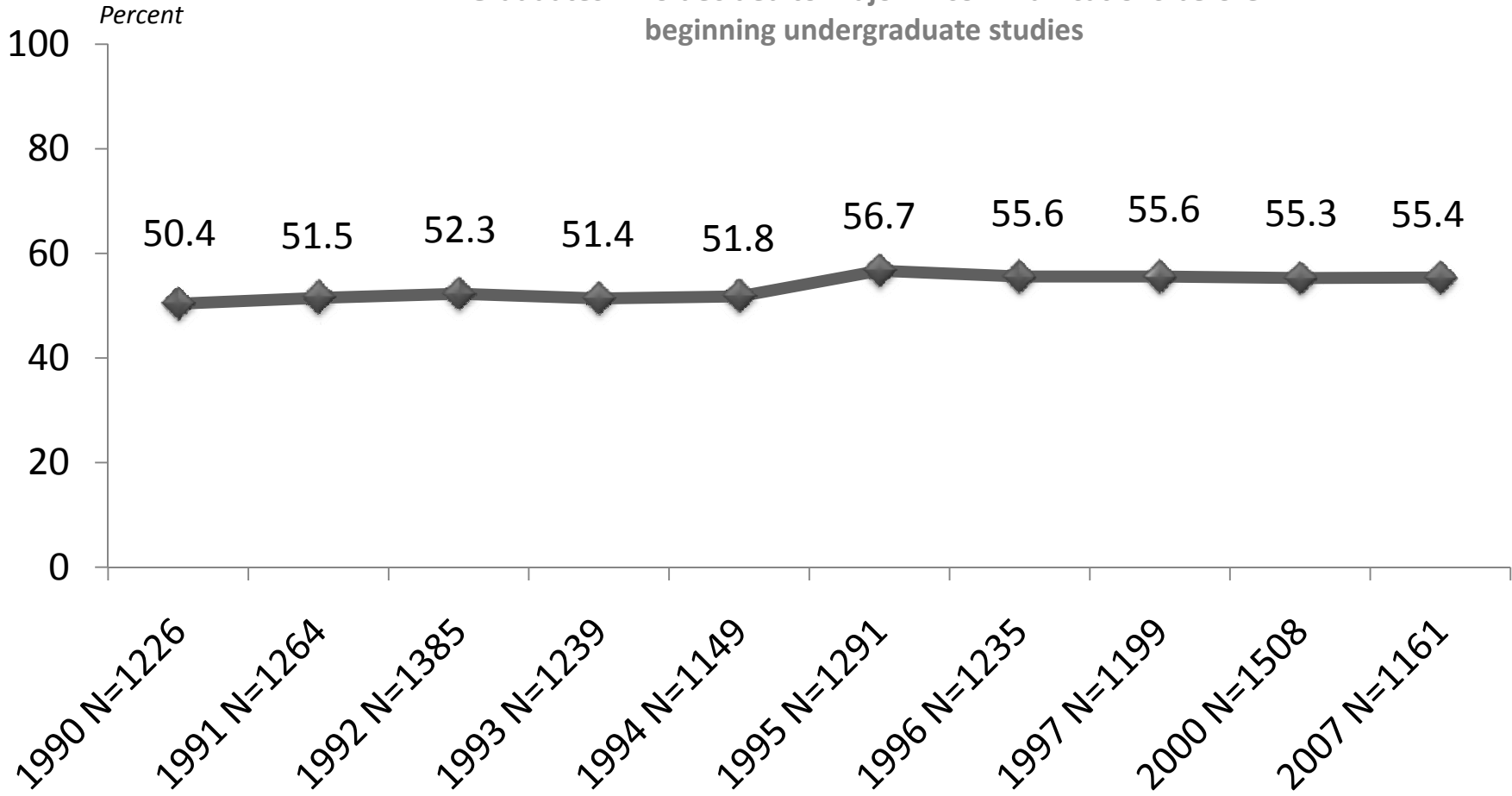
2. High school media activities of university journalism and mass communication graduates



Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates

3. Time of decision to major in communications of journalism and mass communication university graduates

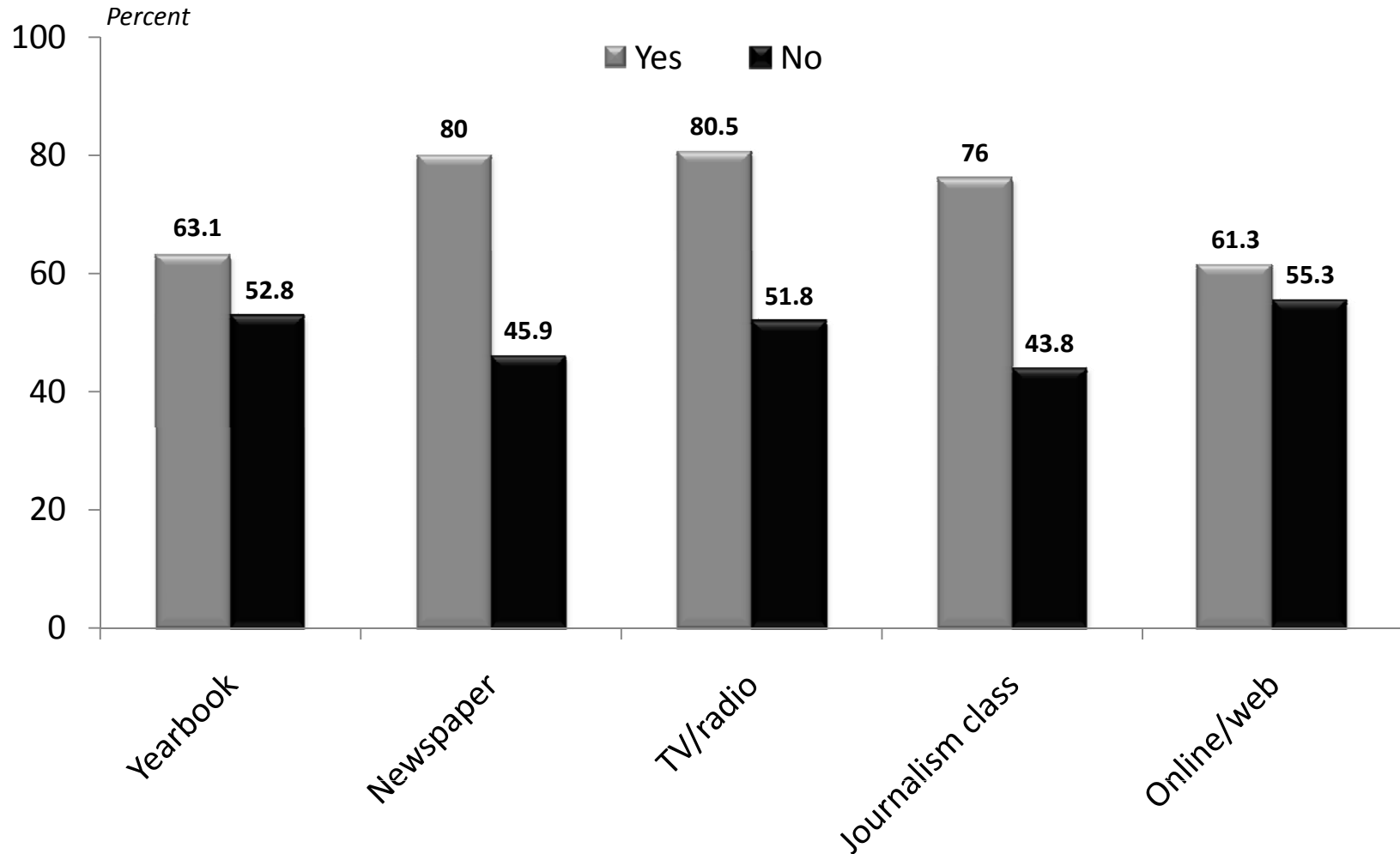
Graduates who decided to major in communications before beginning undergraduate studies



Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates

4. Communications major time of decision and high school activities performed

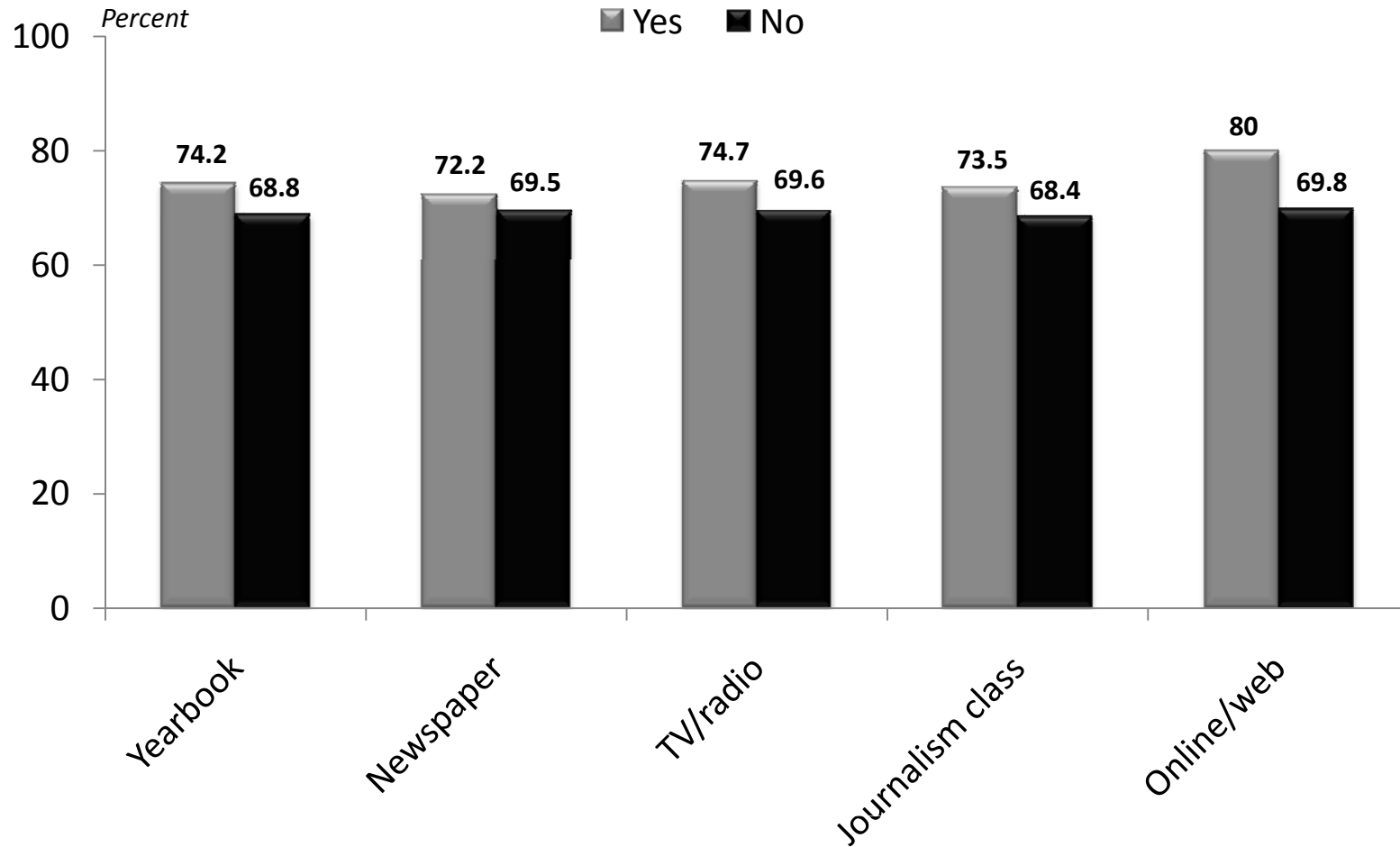
2007 Bachelor's degree recipients who decided to major in communications before beginning undergraduate studies



Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates

5. Employment status 6-8 months after university graduation

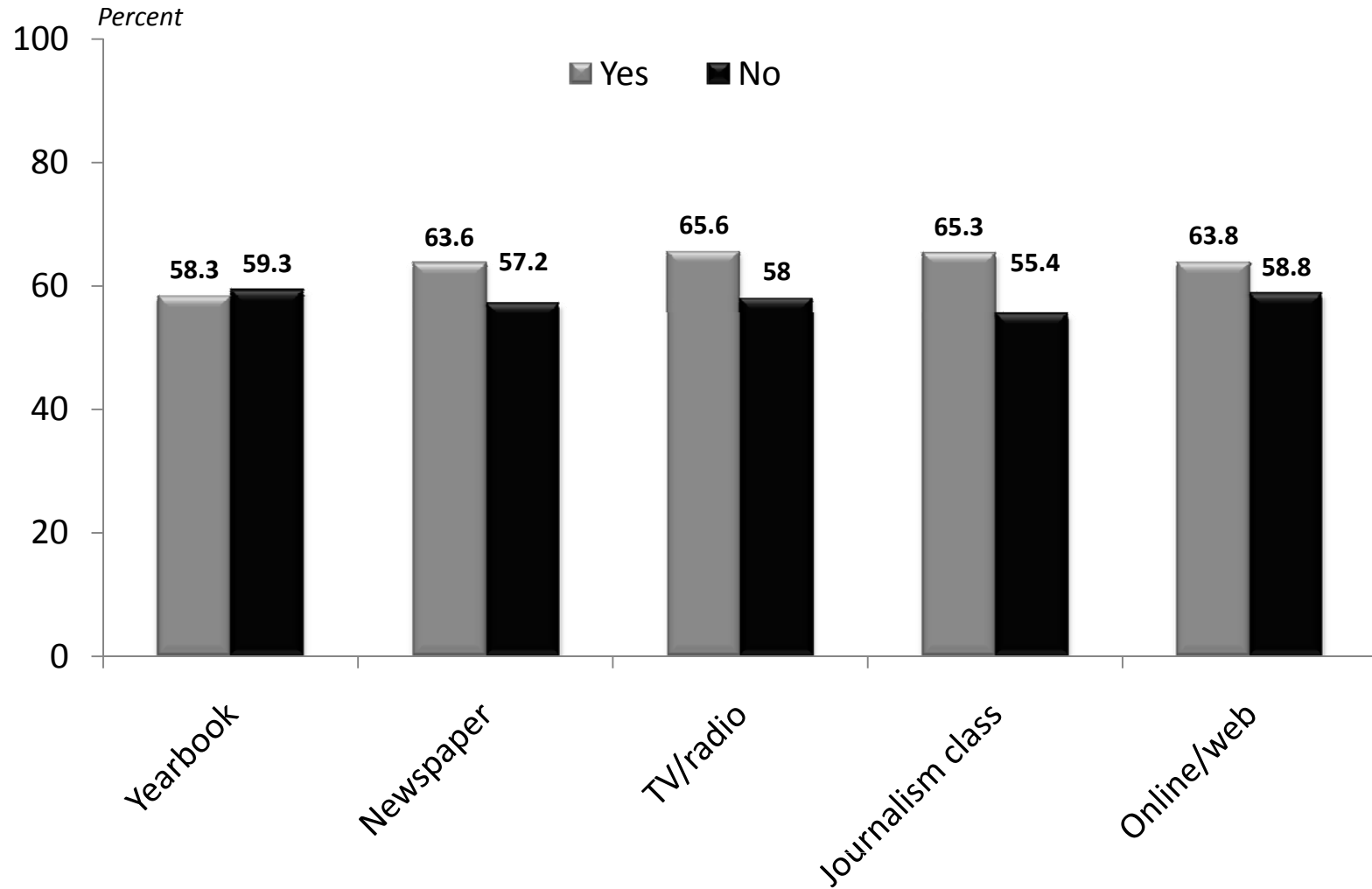
2007 Bachelor's Degree Recipients with full-time jobs
by high school activities performed



Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communications Graduates

6. Communication jobs 6-8 months after graduation

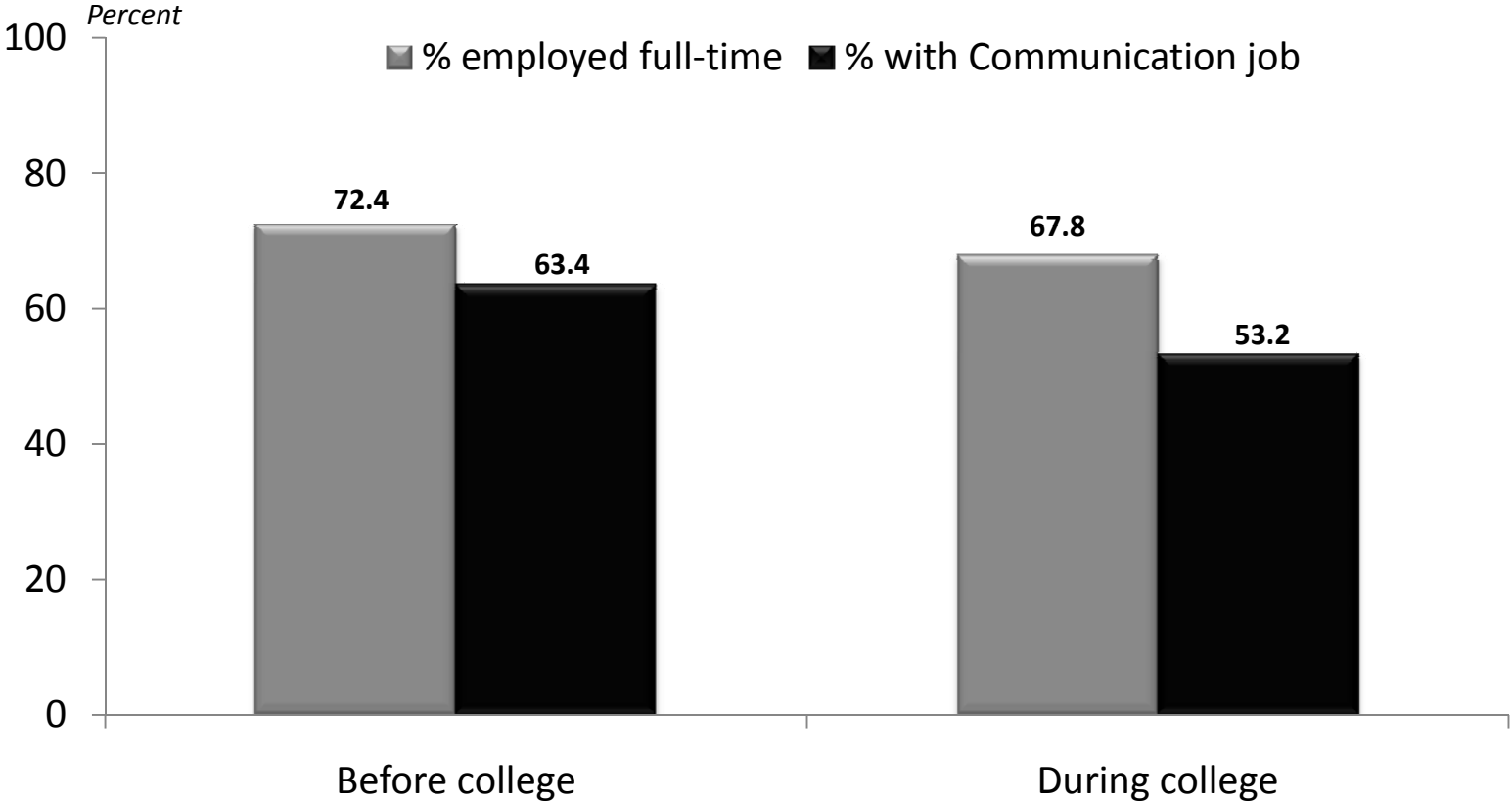
2007 Bachelor's degree recipients with full time jobs in communications
by high school activities performed



Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates

7. Employment status and communication job by time of decision to major in communication

2007 Bachelor's degree recipients



Source: Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates

8. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients between predictor variables and success in the job market

2007 Bachelor's degree recipients

	Employment Status (High=Employed Full Time)	Sig.	N	Employed in Communication (High=Yes)	Sig.	N
Gender (High=Female)	0.072	0.01	1996	0.014		1791
Minority Status (High=Minority)	-0.099	0.01	1995	-0.073	0.01	1790
High School Grades	0.039		1999	0.091	0.01	1794
High School Journalism Participation Score	0.080	0.01	2007	0.056	0.05	1800
Decided on Journalism Before College (High=Yes)	0.077	0.01	1990	0.088	0.01	1788
Number of Internships	0.096	0.01	2007	0.135	0.01	1800
Campus Media Participation Score	0.013		2007	0.058	0.05	1800
University Grades	0.049	0.05	1998	0.143	0.01	1792