

features

Communications majors make career debuts

By Penny Kramp

Flipping patties in the local burger joint may be OK for a while, but since graduating seniors usually aspire to greater heights, the fear of unemployment is a very real concern.

Two former UNCA students and staff members of **Kaleidoscope**, Dana Murdock and Jennifer Blalock, have managed to turn early career goals into reality.

Murdock, a communications major, currently works as a reporter for the Asheville Citizen-Times. She is in charge of the production of the entire North Asheville supplement published each Tuesday.

"It's a lot of fun but it's also a lot of work. I get paid for two days of work but I actually put in at least five," said Murdock.



Blalock on the job: Holding some of the equipment she uses in her work, Jennifer Blalock smiles at someone else's camera for a change.

Blalock, also a communications major, got a start in the broadcast industry when she replaced a sick cameraman at WLOS-TV for about 2 months.

She began a new job April 18 as a cameraperson at WCTI-TV in New Bern, NC.

"Finding a job as a news photographer wasn't easy," said Blalock.

"I sent a tape to WCTI, like I did every other station and when I got the tape back with no explanation, I called the station and they said they weren't interested."

Blalock refused to accept no for an answer and personally took a sample of her work to the station. WCTI liked the tape and called two weeks later to offer her a job.

While Blalock is the only female photographer in WCTI's market area, Murdock's posi-

tion with the Citizen-Times is less unusual.

Her responsibilities include determining what will be in the paper, writing almost every story, and most of the photography.

Interested in journalism since high school where she worked on the yearbook staff, Murdock didn't decide to become a reporter until her sophomore year at UNCA.

Murdock worked on the **Rag and Bone** for a year and then served as associate editor of **Kaleidoscope** in 1982-83.

Blalock worked as a staff writer on the campus newspaper in 1982, and served as features editor of the **Kaleidoscope** in fall of 1983.

Serving on a college publication is a great experience for future reporters, said Murdock.

"The new communications program is excellent. I learned more from Cathy Mitchell than I've ever learned from anyone," said Murdock.

Education is important, but so is on-the-job experience.

"It's important to get your foot in the door any way you can," said Murdock.

She began doing book reviews for **The Asheville Citizen-Times** while at UNCA.

Last summer Murdock interned as a reporter for the **Citizen-Times**, where her bosses immediately placed her in a "sink or swim" position.

"They showed me how to sign on to the terminal my first day. On the second day I was assigned a story, and then they left me on my own," said Murdock.

After two weeks as an intern, the editors gave her the solitary responsibility of the City Hall beat. Murdock finished her



Today's reporter: Dana Murdock, former associate editor of the **Kaleidoscope** and now staff writer for the **Asheville Citizen-Times North** supplement. Photo by Pam Walker

internship last August and returned to finish classes at UNCA and in December, Bill Moore called to offer her a position.

She began by writing obituaries for the first month.

"It's not as easy as you'd think. You have to type up all the information as the funeral directors tell it to you over the telephone," said Murdock.

After sticking out that first month, she earned the responsibility of the **North** supplement but it hasn't all been smooth sailing.

"My most embarrassing moment happened one morning when I had been out shooting pictures of area schools, and returned only to discover the film had not been rolling. The entire sequence had to be reshot!" she grimaced.

Murdock's advice to future journalists: get all the experience possible.

"Work on the **Kaleidoscope**. Do anything

you can to get your name known. Talk to people as soon as you can about an internship."

Murdock and Blalock both advised all graduates to be persistent.

"Try not to get too discouraged if you can't find a job. Don't expect to make \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year--at least not in the Asheville area," said Murdock.

Although the pay scale for reporters is low, Murdock said the advantage of doing what she enjoys outweighs the disadvantages.

Murdock plans to continue working for the **Citizen-Times** and hopes to become a full-time reporter.

Blalock isn't certain what the future holds for her, but hopes, of course, for success.

"I've decided to dedicate at least a year to this new job," she said.

Photo by David Plunkett