

# Beyond the Bubble

a look at life outside Illinois Wesleyan University

*Can you describe what it's like working as an English teacher by day and an NBA reporter by night?*

I'd say it's more like English teacher by week and NBA reporter by weekend, which makes my little double professional life a little easier to handle. Having taught for about six years now, I've got the routine down enough where I can keep my weekends relatively open to handle Saturday games, which the Bulls do a lot of. Generally, though, I only cover about half of the Chicago home games (around 20 per season) and do most of my writing from home. HOOP-SWORLD covers the entire NBA, so I'm constantly writing about all sorts of basketball topics, not just the Bulls.

*When did the idea occur to you to work both jobs? Was it something you always thought about?*

When I started writing for HOOP-SWORLD I didn't really consider it a job at all. When I started in January of 2006 I was just doing one article a week based on the stuff I was watching on TV and reading in the newspapers. It wasn't a paid gig for any of the writers, and only my two bosses (based out of Florida and Texas) were attending games. Soon, though, we were purchased by a bigger company and asked to do much more. With the change in ownership there was money to pay us, and the credibility necessary to send us to games. So I started covering games in the fall of 2006 and my paycheck steadily increased from season to season. Next thing I knew I sort of had two jobs, but I love both of them so neither one really feels like work.

## ALUMNI PROFILE: JOEL BRIGHAM, CLASS OF 2004 WRITING/SECONDARY ED MAJOR ENGLISH TEACHER/NBA REPORTER

*How did your experience at Illinois Wesleyan University help prepare you for your current work?*

Well, looking back I really wish I would've taken some journalism courses, or worked for the Argus, but I had so many great professors in the English and Education departments that really steered me in the right direction. Those were also the years I was first introduced to fantasy sports, which increased my knowledge of NBA basketball a thousand fold by planning with IWU buddies. Not that I couldn't have gotten that anywhere, but it just so happened to come when I was living in Dodds.

Wesleyan is also such an academically competitive school—just being around all those smart, driven people made me realize what the real world was going to be like. I realized that if I ever wanted to get ahead and do work that I loved, I'd be competing with people like that. Of course, you work harder when the competition is right in front of you, and the scarier the competition is, the harder you work.

*What's been the most exciting aspect of either job?*

There's so much about teaching that I love (although grading papers isn't one of them), but more than anything else it's creating relationships with so many people that I get to keep for a lifetime. Yeah,



I teach these kids English, but I also get to teach them about how to think for themselves and live in the world and have confidence in themselves. It's great bumping into a kid at Target or Arby's or something and have them be excited to see me. And the best part? I find myself being really excited to see them, too. It's like I'm growing my family but a couple hundred people every year.

As for the basketball thing, it's just amazing to meet [See *Bubble* on Page 2]

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# Career Connections

a newsletter from the hart career center

February 2009

## Goggles, Grad School, and Great Careers

Think of your favorite scientists (a term I use very loosely here). Who are they? Sir Isaac Newton? Albert Einstein? Doc from Back to the Future? Dr. Henry McCoy, aka Beast, from X-Men?

What do all of them have in common (aside from sweet hair)? They all managed to craft their passion for science into professional careers and world renown, despite varying degrees of actually existing.

And just think. A similarly thrilling career in science could be yours. According to the US Bureau of Labor Services' Occupational Outlook Handbook, "Employment of biological scientists is projected to grow 21 percent over the 2008-18 decade, much faster than the average for all occupations, as biotechnological research and development continues to drive job growth."

Likewise, despite a massive freeze in domestic discretionary spending (part of President Obama's effort to reduce a \$1.6 trillion deficit), the President has asked Congress to boost science spending across the Federal government.

One beneficiary of such increased spending is IWU alumna Amanda Solliday ('06), who majored in biology and environmental studies. After earning her Master of Science studying plant physiology and rural development at Cornell University, Solliday found employment



Photo Courtesy of [www.gcsschools.net](http://www.gcsschools.net)

as a biologist for the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, DC.

Said Solliday, "My job is to evaluate the ecological risk of pesticides. I look at where the chemicals might go in the environment and predict what effect they may have on wildlife and plants."

Solliday is not alone in finding a home with the government. The Occupational Outlook Handbook states that "about 40 percent of all biological scientists were employed by Federal, State, and local governments."

In the case of alumni Andrew Pacejka ('92), he has held employment with the Utah Bureau of Forensic Sciences since 2002, primarily as a forensic biologist, but more recently for the Identification Section which does fingerprint/footwear and tire analysis. In addition, Pacejka devotes part of his time to crime scene response.

Pacejka suggests that IWU students interested in science should hone their communication skills in order to address a wide variety of audiences. "For instance, for my job, I need to be able to speak about my area of expertise (forensic biology) to police officers, attorneys,

judges, juries, the public, as well as my scientific peers," said Pacejka.

Before an IWU student can jump into the wide world of science, though, what are the post-graduate expectations? According to Emma Wear ('07), a first-year PhD student in marine science at the University of California, Santa Barbara, additional years of schooling are as follows: "For a job as a professor or senior researcher, the minimum is 4 to 6 years in a PhD program followed by at least 2 years as a postdoc, and it's not uncommon to do a 2 to 3 year master's first. So 6 years minimum if you're a superstar, but 8 to 10 years is a more realistic average."

With so many years dedicated to more school, Wear says, "You really have to love what you do to make it through grad school." But just how are you to know whether you're choosing the right school after IWU?

Jason Koval ('09), currently working on a wetland restoration project in a Master's program at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, explained that [See *Science Continued* on Pg.2]

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all these players I watched on TV a thousand times, many of which I used to idolize when I was a kid. I've gotten to cover the All-Star game, Michael Jordan's Hall of Fame induction, and I'm going to be covering the NBA Finals this June. It's amazing the opportunities I've been given when I was just a fan five years ago.

## *In particular, do you have any stories from your career that really stand out?*

The first time I met IWU hoops legend Jack Sikma was pretty cool. He's an assistant coach with the Houston Rockets now, so I always make a point to get up to Chicago when he's going to be in town. My first interview with him I actually used in the Wesleyan Alumni Magazine, and when I saw him the next time he told me how much he enjoyed the piece and how good a job I did. To hear an NBA All-Star and Illinois basketball mega-man like Jack Sikma tell me he likes my work—that was a shining mo-

ment, for sure.

## *What has been the most challenging aspect of your work?*

Teaching is tough because it's more a lifestyle than a career. You take your life at school home with you every night, even if you aren't grading papers or lesson planning, because you're constantly thinking about certain kids and how to help them. These young people really grow on you, and you find yourself caring about 100 students every semester like they were part of your own family. That can be a little emotionally taxing, but it's a big part of what makes the job worth doing.

As for the HOOPSWORLD gig, it just stinks that Chicago is two hours away. My wife and I live in Normal and really love the area, so we've got no interest in moving north. That just means I've got a few hours of driving any time I want to cover a game. Small price to pay,

though, for free media admission to as many games as I want while also getting access to some of the biggest sports superstars on the planet. A few hours of driving seems worth it to me.

## *Any career advice you'd be willing to offer to current IWU students?*

When you're thinking about what you want to do for the rest of your life, don't be afraid to aim really, really high. Being a sports journalist for the NBA, let alone my favorite sports team of all time, was so much a dream job that I never even would have picked it for myself. It literally didn't even cross my mind. Yet my life and work has proven that I'm good enough to do it, and here I am.

That in turn has led to so many other great writing opportunities. Figure out what you want to do and do it. If you're good at it and you stick with it long enough, the money will be there.

## *Questions to ask in Interview*

The process of interviewing for a job, internship, or graduate school is a nerve wracking, stressful thing. In the panic of preparing ourselves to answer an employer's scathing questions, it is easy to forget that the interviewee should be prepared with questions of their own. Asking good questions can show that you're engaged with the interviewer, seriously interested in their company, and a potentially valuable asset to their organization. The Yahoo! HotJobs article "Own the Interview: 10 Questions to Ask" recommends the following 10 questions in particular.

1. What is one of the biggest problems the company faces that someone with my background could help alleviate?
2. If I started in this job tomorrow, what would be my two most pressing priorities?
3. Where do you see this department/company in five years?
4. What are the long and short term goals of the company/department/work group?
5. How would you describe your company's culture?
6. What tangible and intangible qualities attracted you to the organization?
7. What additional information can I provide about my qualifications?
8. What are the next steps in the selection process?
9. Can you clarify what you said about ...? (Perfect opportunity to prove you listen)
10. Can you give me some examples of ...?

## **Career Center Events**

Date: 2/23

Event: Federal Employment Workshop

Time: 4 p.m.

Location: Welcome Center Auditorium

Description: The US government is the largest employer in the country with great benefits and professional opportunities. Attend this nuts and bolts seminar to learn the 'how-to' of applying for internships and jobs across the country.

Date: 2/24

Event: Graduate School Do's and Don'ts

Schedule: GRE Seminar: 5:30-6:30, CNS C101

LSAT Seminar: 6:30-7:30, CNS C102

MCAT Seminar: 7:30-8:30, CNS C101

Save your seat online today!

Visit [www.kaptest.com](http://www.kaptest.com) to register.

# *With WESN Sports Your Career 'Could... Go... All... The... Way'*

It is the final moments of a hotly contested collegiate sporting event. The IWU women's basketball team is down two to the Wheaton College Thunder (an unrealistic scenario, I realize, but pretend with me for a moment that our women's team is not slightly more dominant than Ditka in his prime. Yeah, I went there). The Titan women are inbounding the ball from underneath their own hoop with five seconds left on the clock.

The Titans lob a pass to a player behind the three-point arc. She dribbles left once and puts up a three... IT'S GOOD! TITANS WIN!!!

Exciting, huh? Now, what would you say if I told you that you could be a part of the student team that gets to broadcast similar sporting action to listeners across the nation? Perhaps you'd be interested?

If so, WESN Sports is a student-run radio crew that has been bringing football, basketball, baseball and softball games to the radio and web for four years now.

Interested students have the opportunity to do play-by-play, color commentary,

or production for their favorite Titan sports. Really it's the sports lovers dream: the chance to call an exciting game live for a large audience of alumni, students and parents.

Involvement with WESN Sports is the perfect way to launch a career in broadcasting for an IWU student.

It's a great challenge, too. Said Matt Culhane, WESN Sports Director, "Each sport provides a different challenge to the broadcasters because of the speed of the different games and the different knowledge sets and vocabulary that go along with each."

Because broadcasting is such a highly competitive industry, quality reps are a must for any interested job candidate. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, "In this highly competitive industry, broadcasters are less willing to provide on-the-job training and instead seek candidates who can perform the job immediately."

Job growth in the industry is expected to increase slightly over the next ten

years, but it will increase at a rate well below the national average. Again, this means that if you are passionate about a career in broadcast media, any quality experience you can get now is a must.

Through WESN Sports such an experience is readily attainable. "Being in the studio and producing the game, playing and creating commercials, cutting highlights during the games, and making sure everything is running smoothly is a beneficial experience that mirrors almost exactly real world radio," said Culhane. "This opportunity is truly one of a kind and anyone who considers themselves a sports fan would really enjoy this."

Your passion does not have to lie entirely with radio, either; WESN Sports is a great real world opportunity for anyone looking to get into various media fields. Added Culhane, "This has been so helpful in my communication skills as well as my knowledge of the game." To begin your involvement with WESN Sports email wesnsports@gmail.com.

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## *Careers in Science* {Continued from page 1}

"Unlike undergrad, where you apply to just the general school, for grad programs you apply for an area of research or professor of interest."

This is why Wear said, "The single most critical factor in picking a grad school is who your advisor will be. It sounds over-dramatic, but it's true – the quality of your advisor, especially for your PhD, will determine not only whether you enjoy grad school but also how likely you are to succeed in your early career."

To find a good advisor, Wear says "About a year before you'd want to start, find a couple of people who wrote really exciting papers and email them to ask if they're taking students."

Likewise, Solliday advises students to "Make sure you visit the schools before you make your selection and talk to as many people as you can. Your rapport with your professor is extremely important, as you will be working closely with

him or her for the next few years. Definitely meet with other students to get a feel for overall satisfaction with the lab or department."

Another option, which will also keep students abreast of changing technologies in the field, is to attach yourself to a lab doing research in the field you are interested in. Said Pacejka, "I began working for Charles Thompson's lab at Illinois State University when I was an undergrad. It eventually led to my graduate work in his lab."

The advantages of familiarity with new technology could prove particularly useful. Said Wear of one such technology, "Because the new DNA sequencing techniques produce so much data, bioinformatics, or the application of information technology to biological questions, has become a very hot field in recent years. To extract information from publicly available, internet-hosted datasets

containing billions of entries, we use specially developed software programs and statistical techniques. Working with those databases is a specialized skill, but they will become increasingly important in fields with a strong genetics component."

Before you get too tied to one field, though, alumni recommend taking advantage of the liberal arts aspects of IWU. Said Koval, "Keep your options open ... while it's great to find a specific field you enjoy, it's also good to try a variety of projects so that you have a well rounded resume and are appealing to potential employers/grad schools."

Reiterated Solliday, "Take advantage of the "liberal" in liberal arts and explore non-science disciplines, as well. My political science, sociology and economics classes helped give me a deeper perspective of the work I do as a scientist."