

Interview Assessment #4

Name of Professional: Garrett Gravely

Profession: Freelance Journalist

Company: Dallas Observer

Date of Interview: 9/18/2020

Assessment:

A few weeks ago I had gotten the opportunity to meet with Garrett Gravely, a successful freelance journalist who's worked for several companies in the Dallas Fort-Worth area. I had met Garrett through my communications professor, Dr. Diane Gravely. During one of our in-class lectures, she had mentioned her son was a writer and was published in many different newspapers and websites, so I jumped at the opportunity to get in contact with him. Garrett started out getting his BA in history at the University of North Texas in 2016 and began writing in 2018. Once he began writing he first was published in The Dallas Observer and then went to be a freelance writer that regularly wrote for the Observer, Consequence of sound, Central Track, D Magazine, Frisco Style, and Local Profile. Within his first two years of freelance work he had over two-hundred and thirty published articles covering topics ranging from music and concert reviews to social issues and political coverage.

During our interview, I had asked Garrett about how he got his start in journalism and what he did to get such a large list of published pieces in such a short period of time. He told me that when he started college he didn't intend on going into journalism, but he had already been writing on the side and decided to start reaching out to different companies and pitching ideas until he landed one. He first got his start at the Dallas Observer through one of his friends Simone Carter, who I also had the pleasure of interviewing, she gave him an in with the editor of the Observer. Garrett said that when you first begin pitching stories and ideas it's important to be willing to learn and to be able to handle rejection. It is very rare that an editor will take on a story on the first pitch so it is important to constantly develop your ideas and make them clear and effective.

Garrett was the first of the professional interviews that I had completed so at the time I was not aware of the distinction between freelancing and staffed writing. Garrett said that in his career he enjoys being a freelance writer because you are your own boss and it allows you to be able to write pretty much whatever you want but it also comes with a collection of downsides. While freelancing gives you a good amount of freedom you lack the benefits of permanent job life health care and insurance. It is also not uncommon for companies to slack on payments to freelance journalists because they are sometimes taken less seriously than staffed journalists. An example Garrett mentioned that did this was Rolling Stone. Rolling Stone has had a history of taking stories written by freelancers and never delivering payment. Once I begin to consistently write I hope to not run into this issue very much but a piece of advice Garrett gave me to handle that is to keep an invoice list of pieces written for different companies as well as

prices. He also said to be as persistent as possible to make sure they follow through on their end.

One of the last main things I spoke to Garrett about was his transition between topics in his career. When he first began he focused primarily on music and artist targeted pieces but in recent months he's branched out into more social and political topics. Garrett told me that he was originally wary of stepping into the political realm but he is glad he did when he did. If he would have waited any later he would have been drowned out in the wave of political Op-Eds that have been published criticizing the election and recent government actions and rulings, but he was able to get a head start and was able to get out a decent number of stories on the topic. One story that I asked him specifically was his coverage of the Black Lives Matter protest in Dallas in early August. At the time of the protest, Garrett had been working with the company Central Track and was given the opportunity to cover the protest in person. He witnessed the foul treatment of protesters firsthand and was even pepper-sprayed himself, but had to remain impartial in his piece on the protest. I really enjoyed listening to Garrett describe what it was like to be on the scene first hand and witness all of the action and story-worthy information. This is exactly what I hope to be able to do in the future.

In conclusion, I am very grateful for the opportunity to interview Mr. Gravely and he gave me some great insight into a side of journalism I didn't really think much about. I'm glad to have made contact with him and definitely plan on reaching out to him for more advice in the future.