

The Road to UNITY 2008, Part 1

Contributed by Richard White -- Black College Wire
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A first-timer blogs his experiences

It'll all work out, just take it one day at a time. This is what I constantly tell myself after being in a place with hundreds of recruiters, and thousands of people. I'm a student with a testimony -- one that will explain on how I got to Chicago, how I've fared so far, and everything in between. I will call it my UNITY Experience.

If you're unfamiliar with the term or name UNITY, it's a convention that merges four different ethnic journalism organizations all into one. Black, Asian American, Native American and Hispanic journalists meet in a joint convention every four years, and luckily, this is my first time attending the NABJ or UNITY conference.

My preparation for the convention has been a story in itself. Everything has been paid for at my own expense, and I'm looking to get every penny's worth.

I started preparing for UNITY earlier this summer, having to come up with the \$225 registration from my earnings at my summer internship (which I just completed the same week UNITY began). My good friend Caryn Grant from Howard University and Ronald P. Clark, a Hampton alum. They answered my numerous questions pertaining to packages and clips, and I even vented to them about how nervous I was. They understood because they were once in my shoes, but they assured me that everything would be fine.

Then I hit the town to buy clothes that would fit any occasion, business, business casual, and casual. That ran me a little taste of change as well. It's all for my future though, so it all works out.

Next was my résumé package and putting it together. I wanted to get my best five to seven clips to present them with my resume, DVD of my videos and photos, and an article that Larry Vaught, sports editor of the Advocate-Messenger in Danville, Ky. wrote about me.

I bought about 50 binder clips, because veteran journalist and recruiter Bill Elsen once told me, "Never use paper clips to bind your packages; they go dancing at night." A 50-pack of DVDs, DVD covers, labels with my name, e-mail, and cell phone, and folders to hold it all in. I didn't know when the next time I would see or speak to these people, so I just wanted to leave a lasting impression.

I made 50 copies of everything, just so I could have more than enough. Whether I got a phone call, e-mail, or even a critique back didn't matter to me. I just want stuff to get out there, so I can have somewhat of a start. With 50 packages, I feel I will get a good response. I'm waiting for messages to flood my mailbox.

My internship ended Tuesday, the same day my flight left. I originally requested days off for UNITY without pay, but my mentor at the Advocate-Messenger suggested I work the days that I would miss and I did. I was the only intern there, so I really got to shine, and I also worked as well.

Nights prior to UNITY, I was in the office into the wee hours in the morning preparing packages to put in the hands of recruiters and prospective employers. I'm a college student, we don't sleep too often, so this wasn't a big deal to me. I figure I'm just paying my dues.

After everything was printed out, and everything was bought, it was time for me to put it all together, and get my clothes ready.

I always bring extra stuff when I pack, because you never know what can happen. Mama always said, "It's better to over pack than under pack." The result was two suitcases that I had to lug through airports, onto trains and through the streets.

After I finished packing, I went to work and left in enough time to catch my flight. I flew out of Louisville, so I had about an hour and 45-minute drive to the airport where I took a quick flight to Chicago. After I got my bags, I was instructed to take the train, the orange line to be specific, to a stop called library. The train ride wasn't like riding the bus in my hometown of Houston. It was faster with not as many stops.

While riding through Chicago, I realized I wasn't done yet, but I had completed one leg of the race. At my stop, I found a train official, and she and her co-worker directed me to the right path and were more than happy to do so.

So I finally reached my destination. I checked into my hostel. Miscommunications and expensive hotels made me decide on a hostel. It's quite interesting also, because what I'm paying for my entire stay, I would be

paying for one night at area hotels.Chicago on a tight budget

After I got checked in, I hit the town…for food, and just to tour the city. My mouth and stomach found a five-dollar, foot-long Subway sandwich to be quite satisfying. As I walked the town, I was just elated to be in a city of such magnitude. When I made it back to the hostel, I ironed and got everything out for a smooth and quick exit the next morning, including putting together my 50 résum  packages that I prepared.

To make a long story short, I was done with my packages at 2:48 a.m., and found someone to talk to while I was there. Her name is Brenda Rivera, she’s from Dallas, I’m from Houston, and we had a nice little conversation. So as I finally rested my body, it was quickly awakened at 7:30 to start the day. When getting ready for the conference, I was nervous, but ready to leave my mark on UNITY.

A couple of people who were in the same room with me, were heading to UNITY as well, so that was a quick conversation starter. The hostel provided breakfast, nothing deluxe, just something to get you on your way, I had two cups of orange juice, and two pieces of toast. I was quite a distance from the convention center, so walking was out of the question. Michelle Anderson, a friend of mine, told me about a shuttle that will bus you to UNITY. I followed the directions she gave me, and 20 minutes later, I was in the midst of thousands of people.

My first step was registration, which was quick and easy. Then it was off to my first session, which started at nine. I went to a Harmonic Convergence, which was a workshop on finding your voice. I then left and went to TV Boot Camp! which was great. I learned so much, in such a small period of time. Then it was off to the career fair…my pals got a little sweaty, but I shook it off, told myself to calm down, and immediately went to work. Platforms I have experience in are photography, writing and videography. I visited many booths, networked some, got PLENTY of cards, and most importantly…got my packages out. As I went to each booth, I began to gain more confidence and feel a lot better about my UNITY experience.

I caught up with some friends from the Diversity Institute/Black College Wire internship program, Ashley Slayton and Aziza Jackson, then went to another session…After the session I had a nice sit-down with Joe Grimm, the Detroit Free Press recruiter. He’s called the “dean of newspaper writing.” He was a charming and funny guy. After that, I networked more and left around six.

Jon Atkins, one of the presenters of the TV News Bootcamp workshop…sat right next to me on the bus. He critiqued my videos, and I got his card…I will definitely keep in touch. I then walked the town looking for a bite to eat and a real taste of Chicago. I didn’t want anything from a chain. I wanted something that can only be found in Chicago. I landed at Giordano’s pizza after about a 30-minute search around town. The pizza was great, just a little expensive for a budget like mine, and took a little long to come out. I met Evan Nave, Hampton alum and Ms. Roland, an area recruiter, while in there.

I walked the long walk home, about a good 20-25 minutes…in the same outfit I put on at the start off the day, along with the information, freebies, and other things I had picked up during the day. When I finally got to the hostel. I was exhausted. I got changed, and noticed that my ID was gone. I figured it fell off on the long walk back to the hostel. It was too long of a walk to go back and look for it. I’d just have to buy another one tomorrow. With no energy to shower, or prepare my things for tomorrow, I went to sleep around 11:30 p.m. I knew I would have a long Thursday and needed all the rest I can get.

I set the alarm for 6:15 to give myself enough time to prepare my clothes and make it to the ESPN & NABJSTF Mentor breakfast. This time I took the bus; it was a shorter walk, and a lot faster. I met Janel Knight on the walk to the bus, a American University alumna. Once we arrived at the Convention Center, I rushed to the breakfast…I got in there on time, which means I got there before it started. After the breakfast I got a chance to meet Jemele Hill, Stuart Scott, Gary Howard just to name a few.

Next, I went to see if I could replace my ID tag. I found out that it would cost \$100 to print out a replacement badge…which in my opinion was totally absurd. All the money we pay for the flight, registration, travel, and food….I have to pay \$100 bucks for another ID…not happening….

Especially with my budget. I paid for everything out of my pocket, and I just wasn't able to pay the money, so I moved on, and told myself, it’s gonna work out.

Hit the career fair, and everything worked out great, sat down and talked to a couple of people, and got some more cards. And to think, this was just day two…

To be continued…

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