

Copyright 1987 Crain Communications, Inc.;  
**Advertising Age**

January 19, 1987

**SECTION:** FORUM; Pg. 18

**LENGTH:** 641 words

**HEADLINE:** What should ad majors learn?

**BYLINE:** By Bob **Lauterborn**; Mr. **Lauterborn**, formerly with International Paper Co., now teaches advertising at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

**BODY:**

A couple of times a year, AD AGE gets a letter complaining that "college advertising majors aren't taught anything useful."

I suspect that some of the writers are really saying, "Kids should learn everything like I did, the hard way," or, "Don't bother me with theory; I know what works." In fact, I wonder if some of the correspondents themselves would be accepted into the more demanding of the advertising sequences now offered by more than 100 universities.

But not all of the letters (or the writers) are silly. There is room for debate about what an ad major learns that is "useful." Maybe the answer depends on whether we're talking about the numbers side or the word side of advertising -- and on not only what is taught, but how.

On the numbers side, Kent State teacher David Brunton said recently in these pages that "most advertising research that can be practically applied is developed in the professional sector." Probably true, but the young people who will contribute to these developments learn method and technique in the classroom. Analytical tools ad majors acquire are most certainly useful. Ditto for media planning.

Like theater production majors trained in college playhouses endowed with the latest solid-state equipment, ad majors leaving the sophisticated, computer-driven world of media teaching may be in for a culture shock of a different sort. They may find that the real world is *less* sophisticated (dare I say less professional?) than their college experience taught them to expect. So on the numbers side, ad majors are taught much that is useful. They come to work quite ready to begin to contribute -- perhaps even overtrained for some entry-level jobs.

But what about the word side -- the side Bill Bernbach was talking about when he said, "Advertising is not a science; it is an art."

What can we possibly teach that is useful in 86 hours, which is about the total time a budding creative spends in class if he or she takes beginning and advanced copywriting?

Fellow U.N.C.-Chapel Hill copy teacher John Sweeney, a Foote, Cone & Belding/Chicago alumnus, thinks that the most important thing we can do is give students a foundation, a structure, a way of approaching the writing task.

My students, for example, learn the FOCUS system I developed at General Electric's advertising and sales-promotion house agency.

FOCUS teaches that the process has three distinct phases -- analytical, strategic and creative. The writer who does his or her thinking in this order will waste less time and energy, avoid more frustration and have a better chance to do great work every time at the typewriter. FOCUS is one answer to Ogilvy & Mather creative exec Norman Berry's plea, "Give me the

freedom of a tightly defined strategy."

But more important than what's written in the syllabus is what happens in the classroom. How many bright young men and women are lured into the business by a teacher who communicates the excitement, the challenge, the fun of advertising to his or her students? I was headed for a career in journalism until Philip Ward Burton (now at Indiana University, then at Syracuse University) infected me with his own enthusiasm for advertising.

He convinced me that I had a talent for the business and made me eager to develop it.

I don't remember exactly what I learned about copywriting in Phil Burton's class -- except that I could do it. But maybe that was the bottom line.

Was there a college advertising teacher who, more than anyone else, is responsible for your being in this business? Share the story, and perhaps we'll be able to recognize a few more unsung heroes who may have been indirectly responsible for some of the nation's great advertising.

Meanwhile; thanks, Phil. You taught *me* something useful: To believe in myself.