

Jim Lehrer: Steps to Success

Ask Jim Lehrer how many honorary degrees he has and he'll pause, thinking about it, before he tells you "forty or so." But ask him which degrees mean the most to him and there's no hesitation: "I earned my bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Missouri and my associate's degree at Victoria College."

Though it's been more than 50 years since the famed broadcast journalist and writer was a transfer student, his journey from community college to a four-year university is still vivid in his mind. "I went to Victoria College because we didn't have money — my brother was already at UT Austin — but I went with the idea that I was going to transfer and get a college degree."

He also knew he was going to be a writer and immediately signed up for the school newspaper, *The Jolly Roger*, to hone his skills. Working in the bus depot as a ticket agent at night, Jim fulfilled his core curriculum and served as editor of the paper for the next two years, writing and editing every story. "I was the first person who had ever volunteered for the paper," he says. "I was a one-stop shop."

Despite that fact, transferring to a prestigious four-year school proved challenging. After writing to 37 universities to find the best journalism program, Jim applied to the University of Missouri School of Journalism. "They sent me a letter saying they had never heard of Victoria College and that the credits wouldn't transfer," he says. "They said I would be admitted as a provisional sophomore."

With encouragement and support from the dean of Victoria College, Jim protested the decision. "He was miffed," says Jim. "He told me 'We're going to take them on if you're willing to take them on.'" The dean wrote a letter on Jim's behalf urging the university to "give him a test on anything" knowing full well he'd pass with flying colors. "The dean administered five exams and I aced them," says Jim. "They actually admitted me as a high junior."

Now the beloved anchor of PBS's signature evening newscast, a frequent moderator of presidential elections, and a respected author with 19 books to his name, Jim has little to prove with regard to his exceptional talent or journalistic chops. Nonetheless, he remembers a time when that wasn't the case, and he remembers the people who helped him along the way. "Everything that happened to me at Victoria College," he says, "the encouragement, the opportunities, the nurturing — literally helped me become a practicing writer."

He also remembers how difficult transitioning to a new school can be. "Nothing is scarier than walking into a new classroom all alone with everyone staring at you," he says. "Journalism school is a tough place, very competitive. I went from top dog to copyboy. But you have to be determined. You have to be proactive. Life is full of steps, one after another. You have to think of community college as step one. If you have a dream you're determined to fulfill, it's a great place to test yourself and spread your wings."

Jim Lehrer is the news anchor for "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer" on PBS. He attended middle school in Beaumont, TX, and graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School in San Antonio, Texas. He attended Victoria College before transferring to the University of Missouri School of Journalism. After three years in the U.S. Marine Corps, he began his news career in Dallas, first as a newspaperman, and then later as the anchor on a local news show. Lehrer started work with PBS in 1972, and in 1975 started "The MacNeil/Lehrer Report" with Robert MacNeil. Nicknamed the "Dean of Moderators," Lehrer has been the moderator for ten debates among candidates vying for President of the United States of America. He is an acclaimed author of non-fiction and fiction, drawing on his life experiences and his interests in history and politics. He is also well known as a bus enthusiast. His father was a bus driver and also briefly operated a bus company. As a community college student, he worked as a Trailways ticket agent.