When a new WCU alumnus armed with a communication degree concentrating in broadcast sales enters the “real world,” he or she does not have to worry about the pressure of making that all-important first sales presentation. That right of passage is required of every student before graduation.

“Students do actual market research as they prospect for a real off-campus client to work with and develop their mock presentations,” said Donald Connelly, head of the department of communication. “They conduct a client needs analysis, research and develop a written proposal, and present the proposal to the client at the client’s business.”

Graduates of the program say the experience helps when it comes time to make those first sales calls as professionals. “Not only are you working with professors who give you that real-world expectancy, but you also get to live it yourself,” said Jessica Bartley ’06, account executive for CBS Radio in Charlotte. “I felt very prepared when I graduated and wasn’t nervous about what to expect.”

Another part of the hands-on experience received by Western students in broadcast sales and promotion comes from the department’s ongoing working relationship with the Radio Advertising Bureau, the sales and marketing arm of the radio industry. “The final exam for the broadcast sales and promotion course is the RAB exam for radio marketing professional certification,” said Connelly. “I think our graduates would tell you that the certification is certainly a door opener.”

WCU students in the program leave the university with a level of certification that gives them a definite advantage, said Adrienne Avery ’07, account executive for Clear Channel in Columbia, S.C. “It’s really the reason why I have been as successful as I have,” said Avery. “There was not one question on that exam that I have not come across in my job. I cannot think of anything else that prepares students better for what the industry is really like.”

Connelly is the only university professor in the country to hold the highest level of RAB certification – the certified radio marketing expert, said Mark Levy, vice president of educational services at RAB, which consists of nearly 7,000 members, including some 6,000 stations in the United States and more than 1,000 associate members in networks, representative firms, sales and international organizations.

Students in broadcast sales and promotion have access to the same professional resources that those in the industry use every day, Levy said. “Western Carolina’s use of RAB materials in the classroom allows students to fully embrace the strategies and tactics used by successful sellers on a day-to-day basis, before they hit the streets,” he said.