A number of misconceptions exist concerning broadcast education. Professional broadcasters often complain that broadcast students receive too little "hands-on" training, while academicians decry current broadcasting programs which do not challenge the students intellectually. In addition, broadcast students have their own set of expectations based on the view that college education is primarily a training ground for gainful employment. Most broadcast educators realize that, in the midst of the information age, students of mass communication must not only acquire a broad liberal arts education but must also be exposed to the cultures, politics, and problems facing other nations. Only those media students who clearly understand and appreciate the enormous power and influence of the mass media can succeed in becoming responsible producers, directors, reporters, writers, announcers or performers. A recent national survey of broadcast education programs indicated that most are carefully designed to offer students a balanced practical and theoretical experience. The "trade-school image" of broadcast education is simply an unfortunate misconception. (RS)
BROADCAST EDUCATION: 
FIGHTING THE TRADE SCHOOL IMAGE

by

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Presented at the Seventy-Sixth Annual Meeting of 
Speech Communication Association
November 1-4, 1990
Chicago, Illinois

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."
We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge.

John Naisbitt
Megatrends
In the past few years, the educational institutions in the United States have experienced an increased level of scrutiny and criticism by almost every segment of the society. Consequently, the phrase "crisis in American education" has become a trade-mark for a system which was perceived, particularly outside this country, to be one of the best educational systems in the world.

Some of the general complaints being generated within the media, the academia, and the society include the followings:

-- The educational system is not working the way it should.
-- The educational system is producing an increasingly inferior product.
-- The educational system in the United States is lagging behind the U.S.S.R., Japan, and Germany.
-- SAT scores have been falling during the past decade or so.
-- Today's high school and college graduates possess less skills than the earlier graduates.
-- Today, more students drop out of high schools and colleges than ever before.

The list can go on and on! In fact, in its 1983 report entitled "A Nation at Risk," the National Commission on
Excellence in Education spoke of the "rising tide of mediocrity" in the educational system in the United States.

The above charges, have resulted in a proliferation of surveys, studies, articles, books, and seminars for the purpose of either supporting, rejecting or finding ways to modify some of the perceived allegations pertaining to the American educational system in general and certain disciplines in particular.

Of course, any detailed discussion of the charges made against the educational system in this country is beyond the scope of this paper. Hence, this paper will attempt to address some of the complaints regarding the performance of broadcast education programs at the college/university level.

In its December 1987 report entitled "Electronic Media Career Preparation Study," the Roper Organization spoke of a general dissatisfaction, by the executives in electronic media, regarding broadcast education programs in the United States. The report concluded:

--that entry level job applicants (broadcast graduates) are prone to unrealistic career expectations;
--that broadcast graduates do not possess adequate hands-on experience in the broadcasting or cable industries;
--that while colleges and universities provide a good broad overview of the industry, they fall in providing practical knowledge for the real world; and
--that the most important thing that higher education can do
to improve the quality of the career preparation which students receive is expose students to people who have recent experience or are currently employed in the electronic media. (1)

Contrary to the professional broadcasters opinion that broadcast students receive too little "hands-on" training, Paul F. Fullifor writes that, in fact, "many of the broadcasting programs at universities around the country today are perceived as little more than hands-on, push-button programs which rarely challenge students intellectually." (2)

The reality is that no matter where we stand and how we look at the broadcast education, we run across a number of misconceptions. Unfortunately, misconceptions regarding broadcast education exist within the electronic media industry as well as within the academia. What is problematic is the fact that, on one hand, the broadcast educators are expected to meet the electronic media executives demand for putting more emphasis on "hands-on" experience and, on the other hand, they are expected by their fellow academicians to put less emphasis on "hands-on" experience or vocational training.

Smacked right in the middle are the broadcast students who often hold their own individual perceptions of the so-called "real world," and, hence, their own sets of expectations. Of course, we cannot ignore the parents of the students who also hold their own perceptions and
expectations. It seems that the parents, like their children, view college education as primarily a training
ground for gainful employment.

Today broadcast educators are under enormous amount of
pressure to meet some seemingly contradictory demands posed
by the electronic media industry, the academic institutions,
the students, and their parents. As mentioned earlier, the
broadcast executives expect more hands-on experience and
less theoretical learning while the academicians, especially
the non-broadcast educators, expect less hands-on training
and more theoretical learning! While the broadcast students
are not quite sure which is more important, theory or
practice, the parents anxiously contemplate their income and
job possibilities immediately after graduation!

Most broadcast educators, nevertheless, seem to go
beyond the superficial and continuously changing "real
world" by looking at the broader function of broadcast
education. According to Jeffrey M. McCall,

A purely skill-driven approach to media
education diminishes the utility of the student
both for the non-media, and eventually media-
related careers. Media practitioners need the
broad educational background that comes with
understanding in expression, sociology,
literature, business, etc.(3)

It goes without saying that in the midst of the
information age, all students, particularly the students of
mass communication, must not only acquire a broad liberal arts education but must also be exposed to the cultures, politics, and problems facing other nations. How can those broadcast students whose aspirations are producing, directing, reporting or performing effectively carry out their every-day responsibilities without being able to understand and appreciate the interconnectedness of today's global affairs.

As has been illustrated by the demise of the smokestack industries in the United States, skill-oriented training and education cannot necessarily ensure a permanent job. For the simple reason that technological tools, used to perform any particular function, can and do change rapidly--especially in the electronic media field. Hence, skills can become outdated quickly. What remains constant is the theoretical knowledge. An understanding of the processes--knowing how and why certain things should be done in a particular fashion or order. According to Jannette L. Dates,

It is essential to the broadcast (mass communication) curriculum to de-emphasize the performance of media aspects of course-work and focus on theory, so communication theory determines the curriculum. This approach will lessen dependence upon media industry shifts and changes. Higher education, therefore, will no
longer need to compulsively change programs and sequences to follow industry trends. (4)

Furthermore, not only the mass communication or broadcasting faculty, but also other faculty within the academic institutions must realize the fact that television, in particular, is now the dominant force in our society—both at the national and global levels. Television now is the primary purveyor of culture, news and information. All students, especially the broadcast students, should clearly understand the collective power of mass communications. This kind of understanding, of course, requires a great deal of research, analysis, examinations, discussions, and debates.

The glamour and excitement of broadcasting, especially television, has attracted a growing number of students to this field during the past two decades or so. Undoubtedly, some of today's highly motivated media students may become tomorrow's professional communicators. But, only those media students who clearly understand and appreciate the enormous power and influence of the mass media can succeed at becoming responsible producers, directors, reporters, writers, announcers or performers. Otherwise, anyone can learn to turn knobs or push buttons!

At a recent industry/faculty seminar, sponsored by the International Radio and Television Society in New York City, a broadcast faculty asked a panel of broadcast executives, "what do you really expect our broadcast students to know
upon their graduation?" Their collective answers were, "we
want people who (1) can write and speak clearly, (2) have a
good understanding of the communication media, (3) can solve
problems, (4) can interact with a diverse group of people,
(5) have good organizational and technical skills, and (6)
have the right attitude."

The Roper's report on "Electronic Media Career
Preparation Study" not withstanding, it appears that at
least some of the electronic executives' expectations
closely match what the broadcast educators are attempting to
accomplish in their broadcast programs. It should be noted
that more emphasis on "hands-on" skills and less on
"theoretical" skills may lead into the kind of trade-school
mentality that both the academicians and broadcast
executives resent. Furthermore, in view of today's highly
competitive broadcast environment, such emphasis would
clearly limit the students prospects for finding an
alternative position in other fields (e.g., sales,
marketing, management, advertising, public relations).

Clearly a strong "liberal arts" background combined
with sufficient technical and theoretical skills can be
advantageous to both the broadcast graduates and the
broadcast executives. In the midst of the information age,
global competition, and rapidly changing technological means
it is indeed futile to speak of narrow specializations
within any field of study--especially electronic media.
Nevertheless, a recent national survey of broadcast education programs in the United States, by Yahya R. Kamalipour and William Robinson, revealed that the majority of broadcast education programs tend to follow a similar educational philosophy. Of the 126 to 130 credits required for graduation, broadcast students are generally required to take fewer than 20 credits in courses which fall under the umbrella of "hands-on" experience. These courses are: radio production, basic television production, advanced television production, and ENG/EFP production. In addition, most broadcast programs offer an "Internship" course in which students can gain experience in a variety of industry settings (i.e., radio, cable or television stations).

For instance, the Radio-Television degree program within the Communication and Creative Arts at Purdue University (see attached), is perhaps a good representative of the broadcast education programs nationwide. As indicated, of the 126 credits required for graduation, students are required to complete only 45 credits in communication/broadcasting field. The remaining 81 credits are in English composition, foreign languages, mathematics and/or science, humanities, social sciences, and electives chosen by individual students.

The required radio-TV credits are also carefully designed to offer students a balanced practical and theoretical experience. In reality, none of the broadcast courses can be classified as purely "hands-on" learning.
Even in the production courses a great deal of time is spent on the theoretical aspects.

The foregoing information attests to the fact that the "trade-school image," as pertained to broadcast education is simply an unfortunate misperception. A misperception that must be corrected by the broadcast educators and the broadcast students through publications, research, seminars, and discussions.
NOTES


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yrk/10-90
COMMUNICATION
RADIO-TELEVISION OPTION

Required for graduation - 126 credit hours including the following:

CORE Requirements

I. Communications

Writing ................................................................. 3 or 6
   __ ENGL 103
   __ ENGL 100-105
   __ ENGL 104-105

Interpersonal Communications .................................. 3
   __ COM 114

Foreign Language (12-hour sequence: French, German, or Spanish).  12
   __ 101   __ 102   __ 203   __ 204

II. Science and Mathematics ....................................... 12

____ Twelve hours in science and mathematics with a
____ minimum of three hours in each. No sequence
____ required. Computer Science or Logic acceptable
____ for mathematics.

III. Humanities and Social Sciences .................................. 24

   __ Literature
   __ Philosophy (not Logic)
   __ History
   __ Aesthetics
   __ Economics 210

   Political Science
   Psychology 120
   Sociology 100 or
   Anthropology

Total 54 or 57

IV. Requirements for the Radio-Television Option ................. 45

A. The following CORE requirements: (24 credits)
   __ CO1 201 Intro to Mass Media
   __ COM 202 Elect Media
   __ COM 250 Mass Com and Society
   __ COM 254 Radio-TV Perform

   __ COM 301 Intro to Mass Media
   __ COM 331 Radio Production
   __ COM 332 Tele Production
   __ COM 334 Journ for Elect Media
   __ COM 355 Fund of Advertising

B. Choose ONE Track: (9 credits)
   (1) Production Track:
   __ COM 436 Script Writing
   __ COM 441 Advanced TV Production
   __ COM 533 Documentary Television

   (2) Management Track:
   __ COM 430 Broadcast Sales
   __ COM 532 Telecom Sys Mgmt
   __ COM 539 Broadcast Programm

C. Choose TWO from the following: (6 credits)
   __ COM 253 Intro to Public Rel
   __ COM 255 Intro to News Writ & Edit
   __ COM 325 Interviewing
   __ COM 330 Theories of Mass Com
   __ COM 352 Mass Communication Law

   (* May not also be used to satisfy track requirement.)

D. Choose TWO from the following: (6 credits)
   __ COM 213 Voice and Diction
   __ COM 225 Intro to Rhet & Soc Infl
   __ COM 300 Intro to Res in Com
   __ COM 318 Prin of Persuasion
   __ COM 320 Grp Disc & Conf Leadshp

   __ COM 323 Bus & Prof Spk
   __ COM 343 Fund of Oral Intpr
   __ COM 365 Comm & Aging
   __ THTR 230 Acting I

   __ ENGL 376 The Movies OR
   __ ENGL 386 Hist of Film to
   __ 1938 OR ENGL 387 Hist of
   __ Film to Present

Electives: .......................................................... 27 - 24