



*Rawlings, right in the Oklahoma Daily newsroom, judged basic journalistic skills adequate to technology's challenge.*

# The New Journalism

By ELDEN E. RAWLINGS

**Change was the order of the day in OU journalism, and Elden Rawlings was the man charged with the task. His tenure was tragically brief. This *Sooner Magazine* article was written just two days before his death on Christmas morning.**

**“W**hat we need here is a quality school.”

This comment made by an alumnus to a journalism dean in another state could have been made any place, including the area around the water fountains at Copeland Hall, the home of the H. H. Herbert School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Quality would be easier to define if one were trying to locate it in, say, sugar or oil. The properties could be

determined easily, and they either would add up to sugar or oil, or they wouldn't. An academic enterprise is different. A school is what we agree it is. Yet, because of its diversity and ongoing nature (sometimes it takes years for a student to realize the value of a particular course), it is difficult for anyone to get the full picture of the school's many facets. As a result, faculties proceed on the faith that, as a group, their considered

judgments will best serve the students in the long run.

At OU, our past has served us well. The issue of *The Atlantic* that carried the blockbuster story about David Stockman's disagreements with Reaganomics also carried the name of William Whitworth as editor. Bill Whitworth sat next to me in the late Professor John R. Whitaker's editorial writing class in the 1950s. Ray Shaw, president of Dow-Jones, is also

a former OU journalism student, as are many others who have succeeded professionally.

But where are we now, and where will the future take us? The faculty currently is addressing these questions in a major study of its needs.

Things have changed since the late 1950s. Satellites and computers have changed dramatically the processes of mass communication. Journalists have become comfortable, almost, with video display terminals. The rapid relay of information and the portability of technology still has the power to amaze us, but as consumers, we have the increasing ability to control the type and timing of our information and entertainment. From an advertising viewpoint, the scores of cable channels can have great economic impact on the dollar value of a network television commercial, changing the way our mass media will be supported financially in the future.

How does an academic unit concerned with mass communication prepare for this new technological age? It depends, in part, on how a school limits its offerings. I suppose we could ignore the communication revolution and its implications for undergraduate and graduate education. But that hasn't been the way in which OU's journalism school has responded to change in the past. Quite the contrary. Throughout its 70-year history, our faculty has embraced relevant new developments in each area of mass communication in their earliest stages. Most recently, for example, journalism's broadcast news and motion picture courses were merged with work in radio-television of the Department of Communication to offer a comprehensive radio-television-film program in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

The process of adding related disciplines, however, has stretched severely the conventional definition of journalism. The teaching of news and editorial journalism at OU began in 1911 and became a full-fledged program in 1913. By 1916 instruction in advertising had been added. The school introduced graduate work in journalism in 1930, and instruction in radio news in 1939. In 1940, a course

in public relations was begun, one of the first such academic programs in the nation. The professional writing program, which had its beginnings in 1933 in the English department, became a part of the School of Journalism in 1950. In 1968, the high school teacher certification program began. Then came the 1976 coalescence of broadcasting and film studies.

Journalism education at the University of Oklahoma hasn't been narrowly defined, but has grown over the years both in definition and opportunity. The tie that has bound these academic programs is their mutual interest in professional communication. They have thrived in this environment. More than 1,000 students are enrolled in our undergraduate and graduate programs, making the school 16th in size among 166 institutions reporting their journalism enrollments in 1981.

Part of the answer to the future is to consider where student academic interests are now. Clearly, student demand is heavy in electromedia. Of

the 1,011 declared majors this fall, 327 indicated they were working toward degrees in the radio-television-film sequence. Even more were aiming their academic studies toward the indirect media — public relations and advertising — where 443 of our students had declared majors. Programs preparing students for news, professional writing and journalism teaching careers had attracted 206 majors. (The remaining 35 were graduate students.)

Student preference at the University of Oklahoma follows national trends, if a survey released this fall is an accurate picture. The survey, funded by the Gannett Foundation and conducted by Professor Paul Peterson at Ohio State University, also reflected heavy interests in the electromedia, public relations and advertising.

Peterson discovered, as we have at OU, that less than 15 percent of the students in schools and departments of journalism were being prepared for news careers in print media.

What seems clear from the scant



*New video tape editing equipment, purchased this fall with assistance from the OU Associates, is giving graduate student James Hale, left with supervisor Dave Davis, experience far advanced from that previously available.*

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interest in print media news, both at OU and nationally, is that the Watergate era, with its glamorization of investigative reporting, cannot be held responsible for the growth in journalism enrollments during the last 20 years. In 1960, journalism majors totalled 11,390 nationally; by 1980, that number had grown to an estimated 75,000 — more than six times the 1960 enrollment. While enrollments have boomed, the nature of journalism and journalism education has changed as students and their employers have discovered that the training received in a journalism program has many applications in the marketplace.

What the enrollment figures explain is the location of present academic programs and the student interest in them. Absent from this picture, however, is what should be taught about the new technology which promises to revolutionize the way in which we get our information and entertainment and carry on our lives.

So far journalism education has paid little attention to the question of new technology, probably because so little is known about its acceptance by the public. Right now, we have a technology-driven demand — not a mass consumer-driven demand — for many of the applications. The technological ability exists for dramatic innovations, but public interest is uncertain.

For instance, two-way cable makes it possible for us to gain our daily news, scan classified advertising, purchase airplane tickets, do our banking, order from Sears, and find out what is on the menu tonight at assorted restaurants. This is not to mention the possibility for participating more immediately in our own government, providing home security, monitoring our utilities, and providing us with an electronic link

to medical services. But are we prepared to purchase the receiving unit necessary for this? More importantly, would we use it if we had it? We don't yet know the answers to these questions.

Several experiments are being conducted now. Two of the better known are the Qube two-way cable television service in Columbus, Ohio, and the Viewtron experiment in Coral Gables, Florida, and now expanded to the Boston area. The Qube system, owned by Warner Amex Cable Communications, is a 30-channel system of news, movies, educational, civic and other programming. Viewtron, a joint venture between Knight-Ridder and American Telephone and Telegraph Co., permits two-way communications between viewers and a computer data base to retrieve such information as news, sports, financial quotations, consumer advice and advertising. The system also offers a transactional service, giving users the opportunity for banking, shopping and making reservations for traveling, dining and amusements.

But the jury, made up of consumers, still is out on the question of the public's willingness to pay for such convenience. People have yet to learn how to use such services and have not come to depend on them for goods and services.

In the Qube experiment, the *Wall Street Journal* reports that people subscribe for the same basic reasons that people elsewhere buy cable TV. Its most popular features are its pay-per-view movies, its diversity of programming and its optional home-security service. But subscribers really haven't taken to the interactive features of the system as yet.

One of the effects cable may have is a fragmentation of network television audiences. "In the near future," *Editor and Publisher* (October 31, 1981) reports, "NBC, ABC, and CBS

will no longer be able to provide the advertiser with a mass marketing medium with as effective penetration as they do today."

Newspapers — at least those which can provide total market coverage — may be able to take advantage of these circumstances in the short run. Newspaper advertising departments have become increasingly sophisticated in providing advertisers with "psychographics," psychological profiles of their readers based on ZIP code and other demographic data which explain buying tendencies.

Robert Coen, senior vice president of McCann-Erickson, was recently quoted as saying that total advertising expenditures in the year 2001 would be \$475 billion, a growth during the next 20 years approaching 800 per cent. Newspapers' share of that market, he predicted, would soar from its present \$15.5 billion to \$120 billion.

Katherine Graham, chairman of the board of the Washington Post Co., observed, "I'm confident that newspapers can resume real circulation growth in the 1980s. But there is every reason to believe that proliferation of media will continue. Far more sources of information will be available in the year 2001 than exist today."

The history of American mass media is that as a new, viable medium emerges existing media do not go out of business, but rather accommodate to new circumstances. For instance, television dramatically changed newspapers, magazines and radio, but all are surviving quite healthily. So it will be with the new technology.

But getting information by a cathode ray tube has its effective limits. In referring to electronic information delivery, John R. Werner, a research and development specialist for the *New York Times* observed that "We feel it will succeed where short,

terse tidbits of information are sought, such as airline reservation availability, stock market quotations or home banking. It is *not* a good medium for browsing. When you glance at a broadcast newspaper page, your eyes scan up to 5,000 words in an instant. TV screens can barely show 32 characters by 12 lines, or about 80 words per screenful if every line is full. That means it takes 72 screenful of information to show one page of newspaper news, or 1,200 to eyeball a page of classified ads."

So what does this say to us in journalism education? We could respond by saying we hope this technological revolution will go away. Unfortunately, we can't because it won't. But neither is there evidence of need to teach our students a whole new set of skills.

What, then, should be included in that body of knowledge required of all journalism majors, that core of common principles and abiding values useful to students who hope not only to become productive professionals but also useful citizens?

In considering this question, it is important to understand the typical beginning student, a young person 18 or 19 years old, who is in the process of considering career alternatives, who isn't fully aware of all the options available within the broad field of mass communications and who lacks the maturity to make these decisions without guidance.

#### **(1) A survey of mass communication fields:**

First, the students should be aware of all the media, their roles and functions in society, and how they interact. They also need to see themselves, if only for a fleeting moment, in as many career situations as possible. These visits-to-the-future should be complete with opportunities, problems and controls — for instance, the immediacy connected with a wire service reporter's task; the challenge of presenting an advertising campaign to a client; and the complexity of assembling a television show. Students also should get a notion of economic realities, in other words, how media exist in a private enterprise system.

#### **(2) Writing for Mass Media:**

Writing for public communication

is common to all of these programs, and even before admission to a program the student should give evidence of basic language skills. Unless he or she has had a course in high school journalism or has worked on the school paper or some other publication, this is the first time the student has had experience in reducing thoughts to paper for a general audience. While there are various modes of writing for a mass public — developed in later courses in various curricula — they generally follow a journalistic style which the student should master early.

#### **(3) The New Communication Technologies:**

An understanding of recently-developed communication technology also should be a part of the educated individual's background. This is not necessarily a hands-on course, but rather an explanation and demonstration of communication technologies and their applications. Some of the technologies considered would include phototypesetting systems and "instant publishing"; cable systems and their abundant abilities; the application of data banks; use of small computers; word processing systems; the role of satellites in the communication revolution, to name a few. The question of economics would also be explored, including an examination of cost-benefit and the potential market for new applications. There also should be exploration of the effect on values this continuing revolution will have on this and other societies.

#### **(4) Communication Law and Ethics:**

Students continue to need an understanding of the legal and ethical issues relating to mass media and society. The electronic era will make the question of privacy, for instance, a greater issue than it has been in the past. If a person can purchase, bank, plan travel, have entertainment — all without leaving home — it is also possible that persons outside can monitor these activities electronically without right or reason. The issues of the public's right to know and the individual's right to privacy is entering a new era. In a time of change, the public would like to be assured that traditional values can be carried into the future. The issues of privacy,

however, are only one set of problems affecting mass communications of the future.

The faculty also faces the challenge of better advising students along ways that meet their particular interests and abilities. I became acquainted recently with Mike Kinerk, who serves as liaison between the *Miami Herald* newsroom and the Miami Herald Publishing Company, the newspaper's production department. Mike had an excellent high school journalism teacher, and when he arrived at Indiana University he was well into his journalism education. Because he was advanced, Mike and his adviser discovered during his junior year that he had completed requirements for his journalism degree. His adviser also discovered by looking at his records that Mike's mathematics scores were excellent, and suggested that he enter a beginning computer course. Mike enjoyed it, and by the end of his four-year career he had *two* majors, one in journalism and another in computer science. These credentials made him particularly attractive to a major newspaper, a result which would not have occurred had his journalism adviser not been sensitive to Mike's abilities and aptitudes.

Schools of journalism and mass communication face a responsibility for providing continuing education for individuals at mid-career. Problems in the management of our mass media are still not being well addressed in our programs. Typically the point at which individuals need these skills is when it is the least opportune time to return to school for an extended period. Short courses and conferences, addressing these needs and drawing on the skills of our faculty, should be a part of the school's future.

Someone observed long ago that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The teacher still is dealing with the student seeking a better understanding of his or her environment, and how to relate to it. Our charge is to help that student to understand enduring values and to develop skills and knowledge pertinent to the world he or she will enter. As to whether this is a quality endeavor? Someone else will have to figure that one out. 