

RTNDF's Teacher-to-Teacher Guide

Getting Started - Part II: The Teacher

Our last segment focused on key questions for new broadcast teachers, including the nature of their audience, their products, and their state requirements. In this installment, we turn to the teacher.

Jhonna Dillard, CNN News technology trainer and owner of JC Dillard Media Services, a media consulting and production company, interviewed several seasoned broadcast teachers about how they got started. Some of her findings are presented below, in "How They Did It."

After talking with the teachers, Jhonna also came up with some suggestions for how a new teacher should visualize his or her role when making the commitment to a broadcast program.

Because of their varied backgrounds, most broadcast teachers who are just starting out have some knowledge gaps. **Dave Davis** of the Student Television Network offers some observations on this situation in a short piece entitled "Are You Ready?"

How They Did It

One of the biggest lessons learned from preparing this guide is that there is no "typical" program or "typical" teacher. Programs have been started by English teachers, journalism teachers, public speaking teachers, yearbook advisers, voc-ed teachers, and school technology specialists.

Virtually anyone—no matter how small the school or the budget—can build a broadcast program. Take Dennis Hamm, who advises the broadcast program for Assumption High School, an all-girls Catholic school of 975 students in Louisville, Ky. Not only did he have to start his broadcast program from scratch, he did it as a public speaking teacher who had no journalism experience. As Hamm explains, "The biggest challenge was my lack of

Visualize Your Role in the Program

Jhonna also suggests that teachers make a serious attempt to visualize their own role in the program at the outset. As she reminds us, starting a broadcast program – no matter how modest – requires a serious investment of time and resources. One of the things teachers must do before taking on this new role is to determine how much of their personal resources they're willing to commit to this endeavor.

Jhonna suggests that teachers engage in some soul-searching to come up with answers to some of these questions:

- Where do you want to focus your time and resources?
 - Classroom instruction?
 - Producing products, e.g., news shows, PSAs, etc.?
 - Technical training for students?
- Are you willing to put up with the inevitable limitations, such as:
 - School bureaucracy
 - Liability issues
 - Parental consent
 - Transportation to external news events.
- What are your plans for staffing contingencies, i.e.,
 - What if additional staff are required?
 - What if they require additional training?
 - What if you leave? Is there a transition plan in effect?

What Department Do You Belong to?

"This may sound like an odd question," teacher **D. Eric Nuttall** recently wrote into the RTNDF listserv, "but I have to ask anyway. - What department do you belong to?"

knowledge. I had not worked in television news, and while I had been an English major, I basically had to figure out what the baseline was where I needed to start. I wasn't able to go back to school for it, either."

Hamm's first step was to learn basics of the field. He spent one summer conducting research and learning about broadcasting. He attended a training workshop, paid close attention to local television news and contacted experts who could offer him advice.

Then he had to figure out what his program needed and what he could afford to buy on the budget he was given. Hamm started small, first purchasing one computer editing station and a digital camera.

In class, Hamm taught broadcast writing, research, and technical skills the first year. Each semester, the students completed a project—a TV commercial the first semester and a news story the second semester. In the second year, he was ready to televise morning announcements. It was a huge accomplishment.

The third year, more students signed up and Hamm was able to offer two class levels of broadcasting—Broadcasting I and Broadcasting II. In three years, Hamm's students were producing a television news magazine show.

"I was one-of-a-kind in my area. There were no peers to share problems or successes with."

Janet Kerby began her program in an isolated rural community more than 15 years ago. "I was one-of-a-kind in my area," she says. "There were no peers to share problems or successes with. In desperation, I posted on a[n Internet] forum for video educators, which I found through a search for high school video teachers. I simply asked to meet other teachers in the field."

Luckily for Janet, **Phil Harris**, television

"I ask this question," he continued, "because for the last eight years my administrators have not been able to decide where I fit in. I have been in the English department, Computer Technology department, the Fine Arts department, and last year [I was] grouped together with the Electives department. Can you tell me where I belong?"

Eric's situation is not unique. Your program may begin as an outgrowth of the newspaper or yearbook, as an expansion of an existing journalism program, or as a part of the vocational program. As **Janet Kerby** explains, "This is 'convergence' at the high school level, sharing staff and information."

Funding sources may influence the placement of your program as well. "Any class that qualifies for vocational funding can be well-equipped through the Carl D. Perkins Act," says Kerby.

Doug Green, technology teacher at Carlsbad, California's award-winning CBHTV programming, "began my high school broadcast journalism program in our Voc Ed department because of availability of Perkins Grant money," he reports. Doug believes, however, that "we would probably be a better fit in the journalism department, since our focus is on 'telling a story' and not so much on the hardware and software."

Nuttall's question brought an interesting range of responses to the LIST: "Yearbook and newspaper belong to English but are housed with the business department. The broadcast program belongs to Media. When we had a radio station, it was extra-curricular run by the Spanish teacher - go figure," said one post.

"For the first five years of the program, we were in the English department," reported another teacher. "Then we were moved to the Humanities (with band, art, theatre, and a few other electives). This year, I am in my own department - Broadcast Journalism. - I thought we were the only ones, but it seems this is an issue everywhere!"

Other teachers describe being part of the

production instructor at Fairfax Academy for Communication and the Arts in Fairfax, Va., answered and said he'd be glad to network with her. "We are now professional and personal friends: we have visited each others' schools, and talked via the Internet almost daily for five years. ... My teaching goals were confirmed and my efforts were encouraged because of this peer-to-peer mentoring relationship."

[Incidentally, in February 2006, Goodheart-Willcox Co. published Phil Harris' high school textbook, *Television Production*. The publisher's Web site, www.g-w.com, describes the book and gives readers a view of a couple chapters.]

Another of Johnetta's key findings was: Don't be afraid of small beginnings. In fact, a small start took Florida broadcast teacher **Mark Granning** from advising his school newspaper to directing an award-winning student-produced television show in just a few years.

When Granning began teaching journalism 25 years ago at Lakewood High School in St. Petersburg, Fla, he had only a fledgling school newspaper. Today, his students work out of a state-of-the-art broadcast facility, producing a weekly 30-minute magazine format show that has won seven student Emmy awards from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

They can even produce large-scale productions on multiple screens with live and pre-produced video, graphics, and intelligent lighting, Granning says.

In addition, Granning's team of 121 students produces a daily 10-minute news show for their school. The newspaper is now in print and on the Web, allowing broadcast and print students to all share in a convergence of media technologies.

Fifty-five students work on the long-format show, *Fox 13 Magazine*, broadcast on the Fox affiliate, WTVT, Saturdays at 11:30 a.m. According to the show's website, the broadcast contains news packages on topics of interest to high school students and is the only all-student network affiliate show in the nation. All the writing, shooting, editing, direction, production and post-production are done by high school students, the Web site boasts.

Communications department, having their program split between the English and Electives departments, belonging to the Applied Technology Department, or being a Technology Education teacher in the Career and Technical department.

We provide this detail to emphasize once again that there is no "typical" broadcast teacher - everyone's story is unique. The one thing virtually all new teachers face, however, is some gap in their knowledge. Below, **Dave Davis** offers some advice to the novice in "Are You Ready?"

Are You Ready?

Many times the teacher selected to start a broadcast program has little or no television background or training, observes Dave Davis. Would we put a teacher in an English classroom who couldn't read or write? Of course not. But a lot of administrators think the librarian or drama teacher is capable of producing a newscast. In the administrator's defense, the librarian or drama teacher may be the only one who volunteered to give it a shot. Good for them. But where can new broadcast advisers find training to give them a better chance at succeeding?

There are several professional development opportunities on the landscape now. One I am intimately familiar with grew from my own frustration back in 1989 when I was desperate for assistance as a first-time TV teacher. In the summer of 2000 I started hosting "Camp STN," sponsored by the Student Television Network, at my home school in Springfield, Mo, during the last week of July. At this "boot camp" for teachers, we provide training by veteran scholastic advisers and television professionals in the morning, followed by hands-on field work in the afternoon. It's a long, stressful and ultimately rewarding week, according to post-camp feedback we receive each year. In fact, we now offer the same "boot camp" approach in late June for students.

That brings me to the next crucial point about teaching broadcasting—you need to *experience* producing a story or project to fully appreciate the challenges involved. You have to be the true expert in your classroom. Your job description could include News Director, Executive

"The students go to 11 counties to do stories depending on what the show is about," Granning said. "I just spend a lot of time refereeing. It's 100 percent produced by students."

The show has aired for eight years and is going strong. What Granning did is amazing and, with a little guidance, you could do it too.

In Segment 3—Setting up the Program—we'll offer a list of available resources for teachers just starting out.

Producer, Assignment Editor and even Chief Engineer. For example, you should be able to tell students on the phone, simply from memory, how to adjust a camera setting that might be giving them problems. You simply *must* know each button and function on your cameras. The same is true for your editing software. You may not be able to keep up with all the incredible things students will learn to do with digital editing programs, but you *must* be able to teach the system each year to your new students. So you must put in some old-fashioned "seat time" to learn the platform and master it so you can teach it.

You also need to be a constant resource for kids as they begin to research stories and line up key interviews. Let them do the work, but advise them when necessary so they do not get away from their focus.

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