SBCC COMMUNITY EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION: A PROPOSAL

by

Dr. Peter O. Haslund
Associate Professor, Political Science
Santa Barbara City College

We are often told of the less desirable side-effects of commercial television programming on children as well as adults. Judging by the number of hours we spend glued to the television set, there is much reason to fear that succeeding generations will come to expect solutions to society's problems such as those offered by the combined talents of Starsky and Hutch, S.W.A.T., Perry Mason, Baretta, Marcus Welby, M.D., and the Bionic Man (or Woman). One research team suggests that we, as a society, have become TV Hermits and that

while none of us is solely dependent upon television for our view of the world, neither have many of us had the opportunity to observe the reality of police stations, courtrooms, corporate board rooms, or hospital operating rooms. Although critics complain about the stereotyped characters and plots of TV dramas, many viewers look on them as representative of the real world. Anyone who questions that assertion should read the 250,000 letters, most containing requests for medical advice, sent by viewers to "Marcus Welby, M.D." during the first five years of his practice on TV.

If adults can be so accepting of the reality of television, imagine its effects on children. By the time the average American child reaches public school, he has already spent several years in an electronic nursery school. At the age of 10 the average youngster spends more hours a week in front of the TV screen than in the classroom.*

Though nothing ill can be said of these programs relating to their technical excellence, much needs to be understood in terms of the long range impact on our collective ability to solve complicated societal difficulties. All of these programs have at

least one thing in common—they all tend to "resolve" complicated problems by dividing the world into neat compartments of "good" and "evil," they generally resolve problems by applying whatever force is deemed necessary by those identified as heroes (and usually a lot is deemed necessary), and a solution is always found...and most often within the short space of a half-hour. Such problem solving is truly remarkable but hardly realistic.

It is not my intent to force the removal of such programs from commercial television; if society didn't want them, they would soon disappear. What I will suggest, however, is that we begin thinking of ways to provide effective alternative programming by which to provide opportunities for television viewers to experience, albeit vicariously, some of the realities confronting our society today; that we begin at the local level, and that we attempt to learn from the commercial experience by applying advanced television technology to such programming. Could such programs compete effectively to the point of forcing a significant number of "blood and guts" programs off the air? I doubt it. I think it would be more productive if we could provide alternatives which could co-exist with the present fare. My experience as host of a weekly television program for the past year and a half has led me to the conclusion that our PUBLIC AFFAIRS FORUM has the potential of providing such an alternative and constitutes a genuine opportunity for community impact through the medium of television.

During this eighteen month period, the SBCC PUBLIC AFFAIRS FORUM has generated a series of community interest programs. When, for example, a dispute developed between our county Sheriff and a member of the Board of Supervisors, both were interviewed (separately)
to provide the community with a clearer understanding about the nature of the dispute. An early theme identified for focus was the extent to which the media affected the development of public policy, and to this end, representatives of the press, members of the Board of Supervisors and Santa Barbara City Council, the City Attorney and the Assistant District Attorney were all invited to participate. The Water Board Election in Goleta provided another high-interest theme as the candidates were clearly divided on a number of specific issues and were generous enough to share their views with our television audience. The June Primary and November General election afforded opportunities to provide both separate interviews and debates with the candidates or with their supporters. Jack Ford and Mike Reagan represented their fathers on our FORUM in the primary election, and our State Senator, Omar Rains, and Republican National Committeeman Mike Curb of Los Angeles, represented Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford respectively. All other candidates participated in our FORUM either by way of an individual interview or under a modified debate format. On election eve, we provided the community with a three-hour edited television production of positions taken by the candidates during the campaign. This was our first attempt at sophisticated editing, and we learned much about the capabilities of the Sony 2850 editing system and about technical realities involved in piecing together a program which should be evaluated as "fair" by all parties.

On election night, I took a Porta-Pak (portable television camera) to the County Court House and followed the process of ballot counting from the point at which the ballots were unloaded, accounted for, opened and made ready for tally, all the way to receipt and communication of the results to the California Secretary of State.
Subsequently, I interviewed the County Clerk, Howard Menzel, for the purpose of understanding better the difficulties encountered by his staff in assuring a timely and accurate tally of the votes cast in the General Election. These two programs were edited together and shared both with SBCC political science classes and with the community at large.

In addition to the thematic approach, we have used the FORUM as a vehicle for sharing visiting dignitaries and guests with the larger Santa Barbara community. Maude Russel, for example, spent 26 years in the Peoples' Republic of China, and at age 80, proved a most stimulating conversationalist!

What Lies Ahead?

During the past month, I have been contacted by the District Attorney's Office, the County Board of Supervisors' Office, and by a member of the Santa Barbara City Council, for the purpose of developing programs designed to help communicate issues of substance--problems with which we must deal--to the Santa Barbara community...via television. All three proposals appear very exciting and certainly deserving of full exploration.

1. District Attorney Stanley Roden has asked us to consider the development of a series of programs concerned with the theme of criminal justice in Santa Barbara. This idea has found much support from other members of both bar and bench. It is our hope to illustrate criminal justice at the local level from the points of view of the prosecutor, the judge, the probation officer, the public defender, the paid defense attorney, the jury, the defendant and victim, the Grand Jury, and anyone else who has a role to play in the system of local
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criminal justice. The District Attorney has pledged full support in terms of providing preliminary information and access to his office and staff. He seems sincerely interested in developing greater community awareness about specific problems such as heroin addiction, rape and other crimes of violence, jury selection, procedural reforms for our courts, and many others.

2. John Stahl, Administrative Assistant to 3rd District Supervisor James Slater, has asked us to focus on the forthcoming hearing by the Board of Supervisors on a proposal to consolidate a series of measures related to the transshipment of off-shore oil from the Santa Barbara Channel. Mr. Stahl points out in his letter (see attached) that this hearing should receive nationwide attention, and that other states and other California communities are likely to be quite interested in any programs we are able to produce. Moreover, it is clear that no issue is likely to be of greater interest to the Santa Barbara community than that of the procedures by which Federal off-shore oil leases are administered and how safely the oil will be transported out of our area. In this case, it is our intent to cover the hearing, set for December 9, with at least two floor cameras. The videotape produced will be, of necessity, black and white since a full color production would require lighting other than that which is normally available in the Supervisor's Hearing Room. The tape will be made available to our local Cable Television station for immediate play-back, after which it will be edited and combined with studio interviews of the participants for use on the SBCC PUBLIC AFFAIRS
FORUM. Copies will be made available at cost, to other interested colleges and universities as well as to communities which are likely to face similar problems in the future.

3. Santa Barbara City Councilmember Sheila Lodge and Linda Lillow of the Santa Barbara Public Television Access Committee have urged the development of a series which will focus on the weekly operations, both routine and spectacular, of the City Council, and Mayor David Shiffman has indicated his full support for such a venture. Programs would be designed to allow a greater public access to the affairs of their city. It is certainly conceivable that such a program could be highly effective, particularly if a weekly annotated agenda were supplied to the press for reproduction so as to allow the viewing audience to understand the issues more fully...or to be more "selective" in deciding when to watch. Programs would combine edited components of interviews and on-site videotape coverage of, for example, "the pier" which will either be restored or torn down, or the route to be followed by the crosstown freeway, or anything else which lends itself to visual depiction and which would aid in describing more fully what it is the council is seeking to resolve.

Chances for Success

Why should our feeble attempts at making television documentaries succeed when it appears that the major networks have tried and failed? After all, these networks have better equipment, larger research staffs, not to mention full and well trained television production crews,—yet this effort has apparently failed to generate any great following among a nation-wide audience. To be sure, there
can be no guarantee that we will succeed, but there are two indicators which provide hope. The first is that a recent survey conducted by the Santa Barbara Cable Television Company indicates a substantial increase in the viewing audience over the past 18 months, and though I'm not willing to attest to the validity of the method used in arriving at this conclusion, the number of phone calls and face-to-face "testimonials" I receive now is significantly greater than when the program began, and this increase has developed without the benefits which might be anticipated were we to place a brief ad in the television section of the press and/or distribute news-releases to the press about the nature and content of up-coming programs. Secondly, and potentially of greater import, the documentaries envisaged by this proposal would be uniquely different from those produced by the major networks in that they would focus on local issues, requiring local solutions. The people involved will have a generally high recognition factor, and a television audience will be able to identify readily with both people and places as well as with the issues. That is, I am assuming that there is likely to be a significantly greater interest in a television documentary focusing on, for example, the problems of heroin addiction and related criminal activity, or on that of rape as a crime of violence, simply because the people, places and events will bear names which will be easily recognized by a local audience. The rape or heroin addiction problems are not just "national" problems; they confront us here in Santa Barbara!

One caveat must be mentioned before we develop this idea further. The programs produced must be more than simply "relevant" to our local experience; they must be technically good! The general viewing
audience has become so accustomed to the highly polished productions delivered by the major networks that we will simply have to take advantage of their experience in developing our own. By this, I don't mean that we must acquire the means (both in terms of equipment and personnel) by which to produce multi-million dollar programs, but neither can our productions afford to rely on the standard "talking face" approach or be characterized as "amateurish." We will have to be creative in program development and skilled in the art of videotape editing. We have learned much in the last 18 months, and I am convinced that we are now in a position to generate highly professional television programs. Dr. Kenneth Berry, Media Center Coordinator, and his first-rate staff, continue to demonstrate the kind of high interest professionalism which will be required for continuing growth. We are all learning!

Our Needs

There are both program and production needs if we are to deal effectively with the caveat mentioned above. Time consuming and professional research must either accompany or precede any attempt to capture some local activity on videotape. Preliminary conferences with the subjects will do much to improve the final product to be aired to the Santa Barbara viewing audience. Students can certainly be involved in these aspects of program development but it would be unrealistic to assume that they would be able to accept full responsibility for any given production. For this reason, I have decided to seek 2/5 to 3/5 released time as a means by which to allocate the increased hours demanded by the task. If granted 2/5 released time, I would suggest that my teaching load include one section of our introductory course, Political Science 3, one
section of Political Science 5, International Politics, in the Fall, and Political Science 6, the United Nations in World Affairs, in the Spring, and one section of Political Science 23, Communications in Politics, for both semesters, to be directly related to the FORUM'S program development efforts. That is, students enrolled in this course would become intimately involved in every facet of the program from brain-storming and research to final production. Students who have participated in the programs developed in the past 18 months have found the experience immensely rewarding.

In addition to program needs, there are production needs, and though I don't presume to speak for Dr. Berry, it is becoming increasingly clear that the demands currently being placed on our studio justify the addition to our staff of a technical engineer. There may be other equipment, i.e. a quality time-base corrector, which may be needed to improve the quality of the television signal to be distributed over Cable TV.

Implications and Uses

What are the implications of what is proposed above, and how are the programs which result likely to be used? I believe that this is a unique approach to the use of television at the local level as a tool for problem solving, and additionally unique in that the talents of both students and faculty are to be employed. If successful, our approach may serve as a model to other community colleges, state colleges or universities. At a time when the public outcry for some demonstration that post-secondary educational institutions can actually "do something," successful programming such as is envisaged by this proposal, can provide at least one highly visible example.
As to the uses to which these productions can be put, I would submit that in addition to sharing our programs with the community, we will be able to find direct application for many programs in our course offerings. For example, the series on criminal justice is likely to be used in an introductory political science course and in our Law and Society program, as well as in the fields of sociology, psychology, and police science. Moreover, the raw material of these programs may well be used in the development of our own courses of instruction over public television. In the long run, I suspect that the opportunities for generating ADA support from such course development will permit our television operation to become self-supporting.
December 1, 1976

Mr. Peter Haslund
Political Science Department
Santa Barbara City College
721 Cliff Drive
Santa Barbara, Ca 93109

Dear Peter,

The Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors on December 9th at 9:30 a.m. is holding a meeting on the proposed increase in Santa Barbara Channel oil production and its related transportation and pollution problems. We expect attendance from all the major oil companies. Federal, State and local government officials will also attend.

Since the U.S. Interior Department has offshore lease sales proposed for the entire East Coast, Oregon, Washington and northern California, information generated from this meeting would be valuable to many communities of our nation. I would like to urge SBCC to video tape the meeting so that it could be made available to other oil impacted areas.

The County will be glad to assist your film crew in any way possible.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

[Signature]

John V. Stahl

JVS:Je
December 28, 1976

Mr. Glenn Gooder, President
Santa Barbara City College
721 Cliff Dr.
Santa Barbara, CA 93109

Re: SBCC Videotape Capability

Dear Mr. Gooder:

This letter is to support Peter Haslund's request for authorization to expand the successful Santa Barbara City College videotape program.

I have had the good fortune to be a party to a number of Mr. Haslund's efforts. Each has been thoroughly professional. Mr. Haslund is well informed on the subjects to be addressed, takes the time to put his guests at ease and the technical portions of the program have been flawless.

As I understand it, Mr. Haslund has asked for some relief from his present teaching assignments in order to spend more time on videotape projects. If you will not think it presumptuous of me, I wholeheartedly support his request inasmuch as there are a plethora of topics available for probing in the criminal justice system in which Mr. Haslund has shown a healthy professional interest in the past. It would be of great benefit to us and to the entire Santa Barbara community for this effort to be planned, manufactured and aired.

Your due consideration to this request will be greatly appreciated.

I remain,

Yours very truly,

STANLEY M. RODEN
District Attorney

SMR:fm
MEMO TO: Sorsabal, Don                        January 21, 1977
FROM:    Berry, Ken
SUBJECT: Spring 77 operating expenses

We are requesting the Fall operating expenses for Spring semester, 1977 to continue with the "Public Affairs Forum" and "Chicano Studies" Television programs aired over Cable Two (36 programs).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production crew</td>
<td>$540</td>
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<tr>
<td>216 student hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplies</td>
<td>$540</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make-up</td>
<td>$50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graphics</td>
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<td>Maintenance</td>
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<td>Lights</td>
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<td>Cameras</td>
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<td>Console</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recorders &amp; editor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classified Salary</td>
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<td>Technician &amp; Maintenance</td>
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<td>Certificated salary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
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</table>
MEMO TO: Don Sorsabal
FROM: Ken Berry
SUBJECT: Community Services Budget Request, 1977-8

January 21, 1977

Listed below is the requested budget for funding two community service television programs, "Public Affairs Forum," and "Chicano Studies." (43 programs for each series commencing September 7, 1977 through June, 1978.)

Supplies
- Graphics $100
- Make-up $100

$200

Contracted Services
- Program guests' travel expenses
- and honoraria $1000

$1000

Classified Salaries
- Student workers:
  Studio crew (5 hrs/per program @ $2.50 for 86 programs) $1075

Graphics production (1 hr/per program @ $2.50 for 86 programs)
  $215

Technician $920

Maintenance $920

$3130

Maintenance
- Cameras $325
- Console, audio & video $540
- Telecine $75
- Recorders & editor $860
- Lights $450

$2250

Certificated Salaries
- Producer/director $4128

Grand total $10,708