

A Critical Issues Seminar

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A Critical Issues Seminar

Abstract

It was a first for us —A Critical Issues Seminar for West Virginia broadcasters. The first seminar was held May 28, 1969, and the second February 9, 1970.

Mullenax: A Critical Issues Seminar*

*A Critical Issues Seminar**

FOSTER MULLENAX

IT WAS A FIRST for us — A CRITICAL ISSUES SEMINAR for West Virginia broadcasters. The first seminar was held May 28, 1969, and the second February 9, 1970.

The president of the West Virginia Broadcasters Association, Jack W. Lee, believes this to be the first time anywhere in the United States that a group such as his teamed up with its land-grant university to begin "continuing education" for radio and television station administrators.

The idea originated with us in our Division of Information and Educational Technology. After many years of working with our commercial stations and participating in their Association meeting, we were anxious to fulfill a larger role than merely attempting to be on good terms with them so they would use our tapes. The need for some infusion of knowledge about West Virginia and about the State's problems became more apparent. We provide such opportunities to other groups which may be less important. Last year the time was right for both the broadcasters and for us.

First we learned at the spring meeting — held during the State Legislature's session — that station managers had great concern over "determining the needs of their communities they serve and programming to those needs," — FCC emphasis; to them a threat.

Secondly, we knew that a Title I project of the Appalachian Center (Cooperative Extension is a part) had been funded to enable the Center to conduct a number of seminars dealing with "Critical Issues" in West Virginia. We felt that the concerns of the broadcasters represented a critical issue. Our idea qualified and we secured \$1,990 to carry out the project.

A third reason was that last year was license renewal time and at least one key station was being filed upon which threatened the loss of license to a new applicant.

President Jack Lee was convinced the need existed and he offered suggestions on the program content. We visited several managers to explain what we had in mind, and to seek their com-

* EDITOR'S NOTE. This story was prepared before Mr. Mullenax assumed his new duties in Washington, D.C.

mitment on attendance. We urged them to have in attendance program, news, and sales managers, and of course themselves. We put the program together with people who had a message.

We used two top sociologists and an outstanding research economist to give them a picture of what West Virginia is and is not. There was ample discussion time with each speaker. Then we indulged them in a series of examples of radio and television programs designed to reach specific audiences. An example: a television "soap opera" produced at the University of Denver geared to low-income Mexican-Americans and Negro residents.

This session allowed for much sharing and interpreting by the broadcasters of the difference between public affairs and public service programming. Many have a hang up on a distinction between the two.

It was a one-day session in a hotel in Charleston, the State Capitol. About 50 broadcasters attended. The Governor spoke and even he dealt with some "red hot" issues in which he was at that moment heavily involved.

It was quite a day. The broadcasters came from all parts of the State. They had a lot to say, they listened well, and they went away saying it was great. It looks as if we started something they want us to continue — "continuing education" for broadcasters. This year we had a half-day of their one and one-half day spring legislative meeting. We gave them a session on communications in management. This year we had no Title I money, but we did it just the same. From that session, we've been asked to conduct communications training sessions with the complete staff of several stations.

We found that station managers have a social conscience. They want and need inputs from the educators. We started this relationship 12 to 15 years ago. It was not until last year that we felt in the position to be more than the producer of programs for their stations.

We strongly believe that broadcasters have great influence through the programs they air. We feel that it is our role to help them to know that to broadcast in the public interest, convenience and necessity requires knowledge of the needs, aspirations, and desires of those people who make up their audiences. We are greatly pleased that West Virginia broadcasters allowed us to help them look at how they can determine the needs and have ways to program to fulfill those needs.