

A History of the BEA

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Longtime BEA member John Michael Kittross is editor of Media Ethics magazine and managing director of K\EG Associates, an academic consulting firm focusing on the needs of departments and schools of communication and journalism. He served on the faculties of the University of Southern California, Temple University and Emerson College and in administrative positions in the latter two. He was editor of the Journal of Broadcasting from 1960-1972.

Whether scurrying, strolling, slinking or strutting through the BEA convention in Las Vegas, newer members of the Association might well think it strange that what seems to be a conventional academic disciplinary meeting—complete with keynote speeches, research paper presentations, panels on a variety of subjects, a placement service, lots of talk, coffee and paper—is taking place in a convention center in a glitzy gambling resort town in association with a huge equipment-oriented display and a large number of somber deal-making (and golf-playing) business executives. How'd the BEA—and its predecessors, the UAPRE and APBE—get to this point, anyhow?

That's the question that Rob McKenzie, the editor of *Feedback*, asked me out of the blue this March—expecting me to deliver 500-1500 words of response three working days later. At least he didn't expect completion of the as-yet-unfunded history of education for broadcasting that I proposed some years ago, or even an annotated scholarly history of the BEA!

Like many today in the halls of the Las Vegas Convention Center, back in the fall of 1959 I had never heard of the organization. Harwood, then-chair at the University of Southern California, bought me a bowl of soup and asked if I had ever thought of editing a scholarly journal. The next thing I knew, Bob Summers, the first editor of the *Journal of Broadcasting* was handing over the files, and I had started on a more-than-twelve-year assignment that was the defining task of my academic career. When I turned over the job to my successor, Chris Sterling, in 1972, I asked him the same question that Ken had asked of me. I've always thought that the greatest strength of the BEA has been the willingness of young faculty members to take on terrifyingly consuming jobs for reasons far more altruistic than merely adding to one's resume.

IN THE BEGINNING

But 1959 wasn't the start of BEA. In the 1940s and early 1950s, education for broadcasting typically was housed in a handful of departments of speech, mostly in major land-grant universities in the midwest. Although the first graduate theses and dissertations concerned with broadcasting had been accepted in the 1920s, the first college course was offered in 1929, and the first textbook (Sherman Lawton's *Radio Speech*) was published in 1932¹, broadcasting instruction was rare. Speech itself had, not long before, been housed in departments of English. (The reason speech was the first home of most broadcasting education was because once the engineering students who

built the first educational radio stations in the 1920s were satisfied with the hardware, they needed someone else to provide content and found volunteers in speech, drama and journalism (another spin-off from English). Once speech found itself with a laboratory, and a function that attracted students, courses and degrees soon followed.)

After World War II, the radio broadcasting industry burgeoned. Television, although existing in a few cities, wasn't yet an industry. A body of communication theory, closely related to social psychology, had evolved during the War and the decade or two that followed its end. This combination made communication far more respectable as an academic discipline, and more attractive with respect to student recruiting.

But there was no center. Those teachers of broadcast communication who attended scholarly meetings went to those of the discipline of their parent department. Travel funding was even tougher to get in those days than it is now. An institutional reimbursement of half the train fare was considered generous. A couple of broadcasting educators might get together by accident or prearrangement at meetings of the Speech Association of America (later the SCA and now the NCA), the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (never a scholarly organization, and now defunct), the Association for Education in Journalism (now the AEJMC), regional speech associations, the Institute for Education in Radio (later the IERT--also no longer with us), the Department of Audio-Visual Instruction of the National Education Association (gone, all gone) and even the still active student honorary society, Alpha Epsilon Rho.

Typically, a program (few had achieved departmental status) had one to three faculty members, and only the chair got travel funding--or had to pay for trips out of his (there were few women in such positions in those days) own pocket. If the "radio folk" were on good terms with the "speech folk" in the same department, a few hundred dollars for travel to the SAA might be found. If not, the only contact between one of the hundred or so teachers of broadcasting and another would be by U.S. Mail. (E-mail didn't become available for another third of a century or more, and the long-distance telephone was far too expensive to use for a gabfest--but a letter could then be sent for 3 cents.)

But it was a truism that an academic discipline had to have two attributes: a national organization and a scholarly journal. In the late-1940s, a quarter of a century after broadcasting itself had entered a quarter of American households, education for broadcasting had neither.

THE UAPRE

In June, 1948, broadcast educators from ten institutions tried to do something about the need for some sort of focused organization. They founded the University Association for Professional Radio Education (UAPRE), with six more joining the next year, at UAPRE's first meeting in conjunction with the NAB convention.² While the original group felt that accrediting the bigger and better schools--those that "should be cited for their progress in the development of broadcasting curricula"--would be a worthwhile function, it quickly became obvious that the National Commission on Accreditation was not about to approve

any additional accrediting bodies. UAPRE might still make a difference, but the steam had gone out of the movement.³ Growth was slow: no new members were approved in 1950, and only three at the third meeting (in conjunction with the Institute for Education by Radio and Television in Columbus) in 1951. By 1952, UAPRE was moribund and almost dead.

Even though UAPRE was a dead end, those teaching broadcasting accepted some of its philosophy. Look at that word "Professional" in UAPRE's name. UAPRE wasn't intended to be a theoretical scholarly organization. Instead, it was devoted to the education and training of would-be broadcast employees. Its association with the National Association of Broadcasters went back to a 1947 meeting of some of those who became UAPRE's founders with President Justin Miller of the National Association of Broadcasters-at his instigation.

Those who wonder about why BEA continues to relate to NAB should realize that, in a very real sense, NAB was BEA's progenitor.

THE APBE

There was a new start in 1955. At a meeting in Washington on May 23, it was voted to dissolve UAPRE and establish a new organization-the Association for Professional Broadcasting Education-with NAB (then-National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasting) as an active participant. Its first president was Sydney Head, of the University of Miami.

The twin bases of APBE were first, eschewing the idea of becoming an accreditation agency (except through membership on the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication), and second, frank and whole-hearted industry co-sponsorship. In fact, the APBE's constitution defined its membership as consisting of the broadcasting stations that were NAB members and active (degree-granting) and associate (courses, but no degrees) academic institutions.

There were no individual members in the beginning. Because of small faculties, longer tenure of chairs, and dearth of travel funds, for most of the period from the late 1940s until the late 1970s APBE's academic delegations consisted of the chairs or heads of the larger schools-who soon got to know and work with one another. While other faculty members were welcome to attend the convention, they rarely could afford to do so. Although individual memberships were established in 1960, institutions-not individuals-were the official voting members of APBE, choosing five members of a Board of Directors, who served with an equal number of NAB members appointed by the NAB President until this decade. Academic leadership resided in delegates from the larger schools, but the industry had an equal voice in determining convention programs and other activities.

At its inception, APBE had 17 members. By the time of the first annual meeting in Chicago in 1956, there were 33, out of the 95 programs offering degrees (48 in speech,

and 28 in "radio-television," which typically had been spun off from speech or journalism).⁴ (Today, there are approximately six times that number of institutional members, plus those in other categories.) Most important, Harwood proposed-and the other directors approved-the establishment of the *Journal of Broadcasting*, which produced its first issue that winter.⁵

So, by the spring of 1957, broadcasting education had both a national organization and a scholarly journal.

It also had a "permanent" secretariat: Fred Garrigus, NAB Manager of Organizational Services, also served as APBE executive secretary, providing APBE members with admission to the NAB Convention, various NAB publications, and other services. When Garrigus died early in 1960, Howard Bell, an NAB vice president and later head of a trade association in the field of advertising, took over-with the aid of Florence Mitchell, who had been a senior secretary at NAB.

Harold Niven, an academic (University of Washington) and former APBE President, moved from that post to the NAB and became executive secretary in the spring of 1963. Niven was the administrative heart of APBE for many years, and grew to treat the organization in-to put it mildly-an avuncular fashion, since he could-and did-exercise the clout of the NAB in determining BEA activities. But without Niven acting as conciliator between NAB's leadership and the BEA, it is questionable whether the organization would have survived as a partnership between the academy and the industry.

NAB provided not only Niven's services, even after he received his vice-presidency, but office space and facilities (including banking, secretarial, telephone, and duplication). Space and facilities still are provided by NAB. Selection of broadcasters for service on the APBE board was done with care, many nominees showing a grasp of education that a few academics, interested in APBE primarily for political reasons, were unable to match. In addition, during the 1970s, NAB organized and underwrote a number of very high quality limited-enrollment fall faculty seminars on such topics as law and regulation, and international broadcasting, until they decided to expand the NAB Fall Conferences, which took both money and staff time hitherto contributed to the faculty seminars.

NAB also provided a substantial cash grant every year which was then necessary for the functioning of the organization. While the *Journal of Broadcasting* more-or-less broke even during the 1960s and early '70s, increased printing costs and editor's stipends led to a more than \$22,000 cost by the late 1970s. *Feedback*⁶, travel and meeting expenses, and other expenses made NAB's contribution essential.

In exchange, however, NAB gained quite a bit. APBE was a proving ground for broadcasters who might later be elected to the NAB board, some of whom had been teachers. (Although a number of academics owned broadcasting stations, were active in state broadcaster associations, or moved easily between academe and industry-at least two senior NAB vice presidents, John Abel and Chuck Sherman, had been full-time

academics in addition to Niven-only Ken Harwood was elected to the NAB board in his own right).

THE BEA

Fifteen years after the change to APBE, the name of the Association changed again. This was a change in name, not organization, and was promoted by a broadcaster board member who found the title APBE hard to conceptualize. (It also was annoying to speak, with at least one very senior broadcast educator insisting on referring to the organization as "AP-PEE"). Furthermore, it was felt that there would be advantages to riding on the publicity coattails of the NEA and renaming APBE the Broadcast Education Association. This occurred on April 1, 1973, at a time when the board might listen to comments, but made all of the decisions. (When another change was proposed in 1993, the membership turned it down.)

Other changes may have been less visual, but were perhaps more important. The BEA Board, in 1977, changed the bylaws to remove the distinction between "active" and "associate" institutional members, and to elect six directors from and by member colleges and universities in six geographical regions. The NAB would continue to appoint five. Individuals-except for a brief period when one director was expected to represent two - year and associate institutions and individual members-remained without specific representation for more than another decade.

In 1985, Harold Niven was given the title "President," which he held until his retirement two years later, with the elected board member being designated "Chair." In 1987, Louisa Nielsen was hired with the title "Executive Director," although the presiding board member retained the title of "Chair" until 1996, when "President" returned to use.

It should be noted that the number of individual members has grown far less rapidly than the number of faculty members teaching broadcasting. This development is puzzling, particularly so since individuals now have more benefits (including voting, and easier access to a place on the program) than institutions. Since the establishment of individual memberships in 1960, growth has been slow. Journal subscriptions have followed the same pattern, with fewer than seven a year added to the list during the entire period from 1972 to 1991.

The constitutional change that led to giving primary voting rights to individual members took place in a couple of stages in the late '80s and early '90s. First, individual members were given the vote. Then, in 1990, it became easier to nominate an individual (who needn't be his or her institution's delegate, as formerly) for the board. Later, in 1993, with the growth of Associate and Corporate memberships, the total number of industry memberships remained at five-but up to three now were nominated by NAB and up to three were nominated from the ranks of industry members, and an election took place.

Location of the BEA Convention Site As It Looked in 1995



CONVENTIONS AND DIVISIONS

Of particular significance was the almost imperceptible metamorphosing of the BEA convention from an adjunct to the NAB convention into a scholarly gathering in its own right. Starting as an informal couple-of-hours gathering of the two or three dozen academic delegates at the NAB convention hotel in Chicago (three years out of four) or Washington (when a new national President might be persuaded to speak), the APBE convention grew to a full structured day in 1964. A typical meeting consisted of an industry/academic panel on a broadcasting topic, a reception hosted by the NAB, a luncheon meeting featuring a well-known broadcaster, and a "town meeting" panel discussion of a proposition such as "broadcasting courses should be offered only at the graduate level to students with a liberal arts degree."

By 1968, the program had spread to nearly two days, while still allowing plenty of time to visit the NAB equipment exhibit. One new feature of the 1969 meeting was an end-of-the-day program of workshops on such topics as historical studies, quantitative studies, curriculum-and a cash bar. At the 20th annual meeting, 1975, a broadcast educator had to expect to be present (in Las Vegas, for the first time) for most of three days.

While committee-oriented "workshops" still existed, in 1975 there also was an hour and a half of "BEA Papers"-involving 30 individuals making formal research paper presentations in four concurrent sessions. Since more and more individual BEA members were attending the convention, reflecting perhaps cheaper air fares, larger departments,

and a more valuable conference, their need for items to add to their resumes helped drive both the growth in number of paper presentation and panel sessions and development of the "subject matter committee/division" structure. By 1985, competitive papers were the programmatic norm, with some 86 being offered to the growing number of attendees. By the mid-90s, including competitive poster sessions, more than 200 papers and videos were being presented.

When "divisions" replaced "committees" in 1990, the operations of the BEA became very different. While some complained that "divisions" were "divisive," and there needed to be a "broadcast educators association" of the whole, most members-particularly the growing number with specialized teaching assignments in ever-larger departments-liked the change.

CHANGES

With the first issue of the *Journal of Broadcasting* in 1985, another cosmetic change occurred. The title of the Journal was changed to *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, although language purists wondered when broadcasting had stopped being an electronic mass medium. What to call things had long been a problem. For years, there was great confusion between "education for broadcasting" and "educational ("public") broadcasting." It could be argued that "broadcasting education" could mean either, depending on whether "broadcasting" was a verb or a noun. It was generally agreed that there was a difference between "broadcasting" and "cable," but nobody was quite sure how such a distinction would affect education for broadcasting. Hence, the "and electronic media" addition was an attempt to deal with a very real-and continuing-problem in nomenclature.

BEA assumed numerous other functions, starting in the 1980s. These included the Distinguished Education Service Award, the Hugh Malcom Beville Research Award, the Harwood prize for the best dissertation, and various scholarships. An annual Directory was published, taking over some of the functions of the old "Niven Lists." In 1998, the previously independent *Journal of Radio Studies* moved under the BEA umbrella with volume 5, number 1. Cooperative activities with other academic and trade groups expanded, and more and more members showed up at the annual convention. Although the "attend the luncheon, rush through the exhibits and catch a late plane to be on time for Monday morning classes" pattern is no longer feasible because of NAB's exhibit schedule, a large proportion of BEA's members still find that the relationship with NAB is valuable.

Although only a handful of academics can afford to attend the full week of BEA/NAB, almost all find that the relationship with NAB is a two-way street, and that academic papers are just as good in Las Vegas as they are on an academic campus. Broadcasters benefit in other ways, as they will testify. While "applied probability seminars" may be unique to Lost Wages, the typical attendee-whether broadcaster or academic-tends to spend more time in and gain more from program sessions, exhibits and hallway conversations than the casinos.

What will BEA evolve into in the future? While nobody knows, it is high time for a paradigm shift in broadcast education. It might possibly involve the Internet and finding ways for professionals to provide needed communication services at a time when most homes have camcorders and computers-which deny the need for trained professionals. Perhaps BEA will consider the qualitative needs of the field-for ethics, valid criticism, Creativity-to be areas on which to concentrate and contribute in the coming decades. Perhaps there will be as-yet-undreamed-of connections to other media and other processes.

Think of that as you stroll, scurry, saunter, slink or strut through the Convention Center. Ideas and leadership always are needed-and they can only come from the membership. The truism is true: what is past is prologue.

NOTES

¹ See John M. Kittross, "Six Decades of Education for Broadcasting and Counting," *Feedback*, 31:3:30-42 (Fall 1989) and a longer version available from the author; John M. Kittross, *A Bibliography of Theses and Dissertations in Broadcasting: 1920-1973*, Washington: BEA, 1978; Leslie Smith, "Education for Broadcasting: 1929-1963," *Journal of Broadcasting*, 8:4:383-398 (Fall 1964); Lawrence W. Lichty, "Who's Who on Firsts: A Search for Challengers," *Journal of Broadcasting*, 10:1:73-82; "Who's Who on First: A Few Challenges," *Journal of Broadcasting*, 10:2:161-162.

² The founder institutions of UAPRE were Alabama , Denver , Nebraska , Northwestern, Southern California , Syracuse , Temple , Texas , Tulsa and the Texas School of Mines. However, the dean at Nebraska did not approve membership, so the original membership consisted of the other nine. Those added in 1949 were Baylor, Boston U. , College of the Pacific, Michigan State , Oklahoma , and Miami (Florida). In 1951, Kentucky , Illinois and Washington .

³ The best description of the period up to 1957 is to be found in Sydney W. Head and Leo A. Martin, "Broadcasting and Higher Education: A New Era," *Journal of Broadcasting*, 1:1 :39-46 (Winter, 1956-57).

⁴ Forest L. Whan, "Colleges and Universities Offering Degrees in Radio and Television: An Analysis," *Journal of Broadcasting*, 1:3:278-283 (Summer, 1957). The "Niven Reports" on schools offering coursework in broadcasting that Whan analyzed were published in abbreviated form in the *Journal* more or less annually into the 1970s. Also see Harold Niven, "The Development of Broadcasting Education in Institutions of Higher Education," *Journal of Broadcasting*, 5:3:241-250 (Summer, 1961). There are numerous other pertinent articles on curricula and organization that were published in the *Journal* during its first two decades.

⁵ The story of the first 35 years of the *Journal of Broadcasting/Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* may be found in a symposium published in the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 35:1 (Winter 1991), which included articles by

founder Kenneth Harwood and former editors John M. Kittross, Christopher H. Sterling, Joseph R. Dominick, Thomas A. McCain and Alan M. Rubin.

⁶ Unfortunately, while many issues of *Feedback* contain useful and interesting information and opinion on the teaching of broadcasting, there is, so far as I know, no complete set of the publication in existence, with most of the first decade (Art Weld, editor) missing. Although it didn't have a magazine cover until 1973, and is still distributed as a "member benefit," some mechanism for making it easier for libraries to acquire copies would be useful to future researchers.

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