

100 174/7/77

Daily copy

SYLLABUS

Communications 650

Broadcasting as a Social Institution

Spring 1977

Professor Robert Lewis Shayon
The Annenberg School of Communications

Wednesdays, 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. Room 224

The objective of this course is to encourage the student to formulate his/her own view of the nature and function of American advertiser supported broadcasting as a social institution. The institutional view is greater than the industry view. It comprises social, economic, political and philosophical dimensions. The approach sees broadcasting as a powerful force in our society and asks how it can be most wisely used for human welfare and the larger purposes of our culture.

We do not ask, "What is broadcasting?" but rather "What is the practical function of broadcasting in our society?" What are the varieties of ends it can possibly serve?" "What institutional reforms are necessary to make it serve ends that we may deem desirable?" "What demands or proposals can be made for it?"

The method consists of three elements: a) Some general critical hypotheses about broadcasting; b) a list of readings; and c) guest lecturers from various branches of the broadcasting industry -- network executives, station operators, advertising agency executives, FCC representatives, communications law attorneys, cable television executives, etc.

The general hypotheses are presumptive. They advance certain theoretical notions about broadcasting. The guest lecturers and the readings, on the other hand, provide insights into the practical world of television and radio. The students are encouraged to contrast the theoretical assumptions with the operational realities of the institution and to determine whether the hypotheses are accurate or require modification. In this manner, the present pattern of broadcasting is examined, alternatives are weighed, and in the end, each student is asked to reflect on his/her role in the patterns and alternatives, as consumer and citizen.

There is no final examination. A major final essay is required, in which the student is asked to formulate and present a coherent view of broadcasting as a social institution, based on the readings, the content provided by the guest lecturers, and on class discussions. Several shorter commentaries will also be assigned.