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A decade of closed-circuit TV, *Alumnus*, December 1968

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Mrs. Ina Mae Silvey, assistant professor of mathematics, who teaches the course Mathematics for General Education, discusses studio procedure with Herbert V. Hake, director of radio and television.

A Decade of Closed-Circuit TV

By

Herbert V. Hake

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Herbert V. Hake is director of radio and television at UNI.)

ON MAY 31, 1968, the University of Northern Iowa passed a significant milestone. This was the day of Commencement when Charlotte Steinkamp Lawton (B.A. 1939) received a Master of Arts degree for graduate work including a thesis on **A Study in the Preparation of Use of Video Tapes of Sessions in Creative Dramatics**. For the first time in the history of UNI, an advanced degree was conferred in recognition of research in the uses of closed circuit TV media.

The sessions in creative dramatics were conducted in the Malcolm Price Laboratory School, and were recorded on video tape. The tapes were played back for evaluation by colleagues of Mrs. Lawton and for viewing by education classes in the closed circuit TV complex on the third floor of the Auditorium Building. The scope of the study was extended even further by dubbing the

video tapes on 16-millimeter sound film, and showing these kinescope recordings at conferences off campus. When she completed her project, Mrs. Lawton had used the full range of electronic media currently available at UNI: closed circuit TV cameras, video tapes, and kinescope recordings. The spontaneous reactions of children to the challenge of ideas in creative dramatics had been preserved and evaluated by tools which are still relatively new in the teaching field.

In point of time, closed circuit television is 10 years old at the University. A modest beginning in teaching classes by TV was made at the beginning of the fall semester in 1958. A studio on the third floor of the Auditorium Building was equipped with vidicon cameras, a film chain, and the necessary controls for video and audio distribution. Five classrooms, also on the third floor of the Auditorium Building, were connected to the studio by coaxial cables, and viewing monitors were installed in these classrooms at a ratio of one receiver to every 25 students. The signal from the studio was thus distributed to five classrooms simultaneously over a closed circuit system.

The first multi-section course to be taught by closed circuit TV was Physical Science, a part of the General Education requirement at what was then the Iowa State Teachers College. The instructor was Dr. Verlin W. Lee, a veteran of open circuit television, who had made weekly trips to Ames for several years to present a series of science programs over WOI-TV. Dr. Lee recognized the fact that his methods of teaching had to be accommodated to the new medium, but he found a real challenge in his assignment. In an interview published in *The College Eye* on October 28, 1960—two years after he began his closed circuit teaching—Dr. Lee declared, "I cover more ground on TV, and the course is better organized."

Although it was generally agreed that TV instruction helped to solve the swelling enrollment problem, and that TV students usually scored higher than non-TV students on course exams, the new teaching tool was not accepted with unanimous enthusiasm. One instructor observed that "we're simply allowing ourselves to be victimized by this damned gadgetry." Dr. E. W. Hamilton commented, "I don't enjoy it as much as face-to-face teaching, and I can see why students don't either. However, I can find little evidence that it hurts anything except our feelings." The course in Mathematics for General Education has been a hardy perennial in the closed circuit TV curriculum for 10 years. Ina Mae Silvey, the instructor, holds the record for longest continuous teaching experience on TV.

Best for Demonstration Courses

Not all courses are adaptable to television teaching. Experience has shown that courses involving demonstration and requiring no class discussion are best suited to "the tube." Ross Jewell of the department of English language and literature expressed the opinion that "of all the subjects, I think English Composition is the most difficult to teach by television. We still haven't licked all of our visual problems, but I enjoy my TV classes. The biggest advantage is being able to follow through with an uninterrupted line of thought—unless there is a fire drill." And student Larry Ingram told a *College Eye* interviewer, "A live instructor is best, but I feel the course in English Composition is a good TV subject. It actually helped me in my other classes. You have to discipline yourself to listen, and that's good practice in concentration for all subjects.

Another student, Dick Maze, served as a proctor for a Physical Science TV section. (Proctors are appointed by the department head of the subject being offered.) Asked if he felt that there was opposition to TV classes on the part of students, Maze answered, "It takes a while to adjust to anything new. On the whole, students are as attentive as a conventional class, although there aren't as many questions asked in the TV sections." (Most instructors have students write out questions which the proctor takes to the studio.)

Has Other Uses

Although closed circuit TV is used mainly for multiple-section teaching, it has other uses as well. Interviews with children are conducted by personnel in the Educational Clinic. TV cameras locked into position provide a better view of the testing procedure, and make this view available to a larger unseen audience than the customary one-way glass in the Clinic. Speech students, actors, and musicians find TV to be useful in self-evaluation. And the studio and its equipment afford obvious laboratory benefits in broadcasting classes.

The video tape and kinescope recorders were not a part of the original installation. They are recent additions, and they make it possible to store lecture or demonstration material which is obtainable only on a one-time basis. The recording facilities are helpful, also, to the instructor who cannot meet his class at the scheduled time because of other commitments. He merely tapes his lecture in advance, and the class sees and hears him at the regular hour even though he may be out of town.

The Laboratory School has a video tape recorder which is compatible with the one in the closed circuit studio on the central campus. Tapes recorded on this unit may be played back locally, or through the closed circuit system in the Auditorium Building. The Educational Media Center (formerly the Curriculum Laboratory) has portable cameras and video tape equipment which can be dispatched in a special van to record sports activities, class performances, and special demonstrations for instant replay. This gear complements the more ponderous units in the TV studio.

TV courses which have been scheduled for the fall semester of the 1968-69 school year include Mathematics for General Education, English Composition, Man and Society, Business Education, Humanities, and World Resources.