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Everybody's Watching Student TV

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“THREE MINUTES in the studio,” booms the student director’s voice over the loud speaker from the control room.

“Oh, no, it can’t be,” gasps one of the girls. “We’re not ready yet, and she leans over the stove as if to hasten the sizzling pork chops. Someone else rushes by with a bowl of steaming split pea soup and puts it in place on an already set table.

And then, it’s time! The announcer’s voice comes into the studio, warm and inviting, giving no implication to the listening audience of the hectic scene that existed just a few seconds before. “This is WOI-TV and it’s time for ‘Best Buys.’ Here’s your hostess Carol Koch, a student in Home Economics and Television at Iowa State College.”

Why participate?

If you were to stop these students and ask them just why they are participating in the Television Workshop, each would have a different answer. One girl is majoring in Foods and Nutrition and believes that the experience in display and demonstration work will be to her advantage after graduation. Another, in Technical Journalism, is concentrating on dissemination of educational material that will attract and please an audience. All are aware of the importance of this new media of communication, and here is their chance to experiment with it, to learn its possibilities and limitations.

What’s “workshop”?

The Television Workshop Laboratory has been in existence since 1951, when Dr. Joseph North, coordinator of Radio and Television Education, suggested its formation to the Radio and Television Advisory Committee. At that time it was decided to let the students, with only slight supervision from Dr. North, produce and direct their own programs. Since that time, four other shows have been added to the list of workshop productions.

“This is Iowa State,” the original laboratory program, gives students a chance to let the public know what is happening on campus. “Best Buys” pertains to economical and nutritious foods. “A Word to the Wives” is a general Home Economics show, where anything from jewelry to pizza may be discussed, and “Handy Man” and “Everyday Engineering” are technological shows designed for home owners.

Students participating in the Workshop Laboratory are not only responsible for these five programs every week, but they make scenery and props, assist the directors in various capacities and help out on all other programs produced by WOI-TV.

How much work?

The first step in getting into Television Workshop involves a conference with Dr. North. As a beginning workshopper, a student spends about 25 hours working in the properties department and 50 hours in staging.

“This may seem like a long time,” Dr. North cautions each new student, “but keep your eyes open and learn all you can.”

From there the student goes into positions on the floor—cable tender, assistant floor-director or mike-boom operator. The next step is floor director and then production assistant. After reaching this stage, it’s time to enroll for college credit and finally the ultimate goal, the first assignment to one of the student programs.

To supplement the work done in the studios many related television courses have been added to the curriculum. For those who are anxious to appear as “talent,” there are speech and demonstration courses. Other classes are radio and television writing, television advertising, and an Electrical Engineering course on the television camera. Of course, there are many phases of art to study, and the Art Department connected with the television station is a practical place to put your art to use.

Are there troubles?

Not everything goes smoothly. One day the script was too short and the hostess ad libbed for 6 minutes. Another time there was a tempting peach short cake with mounds of whipped cream that looked luscious in the studio, but resembled a pile of snow over the air. Television students shudder when they remember the props that weren’t there when needed, the charts that were too small and the loud background noises when scenes were being changed.

But there are successes that are also fun to remember: the salads and desserts that took so long to prepare, but appeared very tempting on the television screen, a clever script, and most of all receiving letters that say, “We enjoy your program so much; please keep up the good work!”

From the studios of WOI-TV, here’s Joan Crawford, H. Ec. Sr., with “A Word to the Wives.” Home Economics students plan, direct, produce and appear on the show and may even operate the cameras.

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