

Podcast: Future of Broadcasting

Richard Gay, Podcast Producer: Welcome to 30 Brave Minutes, a podcast of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. In 30 Brave Minutes we'll give you something interesting to think about. The topic for today is the changing nature of broadcasting. Joining Jeff Frederick the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences are Jamie Litty, Cle Cousins, SallyAnn Clark, and Chuck Lowery. Now get ready for 30 Brave Minutes!

Jeff Frederick, Podcast Narrator: As the 1950s approached and then unfolded any number of fascinating technological developments were on their way. Some of them were frightening. In 1949 the Soviet Union exploded their first atomic bomb, kick-starting an arms race that proliferated for decades and occasionally brought the nation to the brink of global thermo-nuclear war. Polyester, frightening for an entirely different set of reasons, became the rage, eventually leading to a plague on American society that might be summarized as the onset of the leisure suit. Truly scary indeed. Along the way, television became a technological cultural economic and social phenomenon. In 1945, the year the Germans and Japanese surrendered, ending the Second World War, approximately 5,000 television sets existed in America, meaning less than 1% of households had one. A decade later almost 31(%) were dotting the landscape of urban, suburban, and rural America, a massive change later echoed only by the onset of the home computer and cell phone. By 1978 the United States had 73 million televisions, had watched the Vietnam War on it, as well as the protest movements designed to end it, and had witnessed the arrival of a telegenic President John Kennedy and the resignation of another, not so telegenic Richard Nixon. Along the way we watched in our living rooms the unfolding drama of the Civil Rights Movement, a moon landing, and a host of other events the typified the zeitgeist of a new generation. Lucy and Gunsmoke created one set of expectations for viewing. All in the Family, 60 Minutes, and Mash took us in a different direction. Clearly television is changing with content available on an ever-expanding list of platforms. Today the number of households with a landline phone is ever decreasing and it's fair to wonder if the number of television sets might one day as well. We will not consume less content because, in fact, we are addicted but how we consume content through phones, tablets, laptops and other mechanisms, may make the idea of gathering around the television akin to looking at a Norman Rockwell work, a quaint and emblematic snapshot of a bygone era that seems unlikely to return. Television changed America and now America seems poised to change television. How does it work? What goes on behind the scenes? And what is the future of broadcasting, electronic journalism, and content? To help answer these questions, we have a great panel including Dr. Jamie Litty, Cle Cousins, Sally Ann Clark, and Chuck Lowry. Welcome everybody.

Everyone: Hi, thanks for having us, yeah.

Frederick: So, what attracted you to broadcasting and television, and how did you get your start in this business?

Lowery: Well, I got started in this business from actually being a photographer. Some years ago I had the chance to work with the great Elmer Hunt, from this area and that kind of grew and I ended up working a lot in multimedia and audiovisual services over a period of time, which kind of moved on over into television and doing a lot of teleconferencing and classroom training. Using television as a platform and to help that grow I got more involved with the production and growth of television in the educational realm, which ended up moving me over into the commercial world.

Frederick: How about the rest of y'all?

Litty: Well, I was going to work in radio and print so when I went to college I was fully expecting to be in radio and writing for Rolling Stone magazine and producing rockumentaries for Westwood One radio network. But television, in the suburbs, paid more than the radio offers that I had in New York City and that's how I got into television.

Cousins: I got into television because I loved the news. I started out actually as a newspaper reporter for more than 10 years. Then I went into television and became a newsroom manager, managing reporters and photographers and decided I wanted to go on air. I became an on-air reporter. Basically, I got my love for television and the news from my grandparents. They always read the paper daily and we always watched the six o'clock news. That's how I got my start.

Frederick: Sally Ann?

Clark: Well, I was kind of somewhat pushed into it. I was working in the corporate field for a company that was downsizing and moving to Mexico. So I landed down here at UNCP and I didn't like just sitting around drawing unemployment and going to school, so I applied for this position, and here I am, 22 years later and learned a lot and love every day because everything is something new and exciting.

Frederick: I think it's interesting that everybody sort of started in one direction and then ended up maybe somewhere other than where they thought they might be. So, what are some of the things that television viewers don't really realize about the process of broadcast? Take us behind the scenes a little bit and teach us something that we don't know.

Litty: I think most people probably don't realize how large a production crew is, but conversely these days they don't realize how small that other production crews can be. Large productions like a football game or a golf tournament just seem to get larger. At the same time that many broadcast processes have been designed to eliminate jobs and can be accomplished by a so-called one-man band. Even the magic yellow down line on a football broadcast, is probably the best thing to ever happen to a football broadcast, when it debuted in 1998. But at the time it took a huge truck to accomplish this extremely technical feat, it took about four men running five racks

worth of equipment and it was about \$30,000 per game to put this magic yellow downline graphic on a football broadcast. Today one technician can run it with a couple of computers and honestly, they don't even have to be at the venue, that person. So I think there's a lot of "magic" that goes on behind the scenes that the viewers at home just will never know.

Frederick: Sally Ann, what were you going to say?

Sally Ann: Absolutely. I think they don't understand the prep time even before you get to the venue or to the studio for broadcasting, or what it takes to set up. For example, you know, you got to establish your event site or double check your equipment in the studio control room, making sure that it's ready for the shoot. Getting in touch with contacts. For instance, your crew members, trying to line those up and also getting permissions, permission slips signed and approved for such an event.

Cousins: I agree that production time, I think, is something that the public isn't really aware of. As far as broadcast journalism, Dr. Litty talked about cuts in TV and I was a victim of cuts in broadcasting. When I first started out I was a one-man band, so I not only was a journalist and went out and interviewed people, I carried my own camera, I had to edit my own video voice, my own stories, and that took a lot of time. People would see me on TV and I have my makeup on, and my hair done, and thought it was a pretty glamorous job, but a whole lot goes into being a broadcast reporter. And I don't think most people understand that, and some students who come to us, they don't understand that initially.

Clark: And the public comes to you wanting you to shoot something or record a show, and they just think all you've got to do is set up a camera and point and shoot, but a lot of times don't understand what it takes to prep for it.

Frederick: That 3 minute story that they saw you delivering was actually hours and hours of prep and then editing and then getting ready to go.

Cousins: Exactly.

Litty: And that 3 minute story was probably one and a half minutes, honestly.

Cousins: Right. Yes, I remember once I was In Raleigh, and I was a one-man band and they sent me out to cover an ice storm. So imagine carrying a tripod on ice. I mean it was tough, you know, but I loved it. In order to be a broadcast journalist I think you have to love it.

Frederick: What about you, Chuck? You've done all kinds of remote and studio type of events.

Lowery: Well, to be honest, the industry has changed dramatically just in the last five years and it keeps changing. There's things that are coming all now called REMI and REMI happened

mainly whenever, I think, it's a new term some of the networks come up with like ESPN. Whenever you producing and directing that and the commentators, the producer, the director, they're all in Connecticut in a studio, or in a control room, but the event might be, say like in Alabama or in California, or even in a foreign land. It's a given and what happens there is that a lot of times you will have a production facility, a small production facility at this that has some higher-end integrated intercom systems that's tied into a twisted pair which is phone lines and now they're starting to get to the point where they are improving all the fiber integration pieces to where they're delivering these REMIs directly back to the network over fiber and they are pushing and a director is setting in Bristol or wherever and they're directing a show and talking to a camera guy that is on a football game. And then you also have commentators that might be sitting in a studio watching a monitor with you that might be looking at all the different camera angles as you are and calling the game and at the end of the game a good sign is, like, for instance, a basketball game, if you are watching a commentator do an interview with a coach and you know, say for instance, if the coach has on a headset and they are interacting that way and you don't see, say a commentator interviewing that person, that's because he's probably in a different place and interviewing that person. They're interacting essentially over a phone line, which works. It's working and they're saving tons and tons of money and being able to deliver more and more entertainment to you as the customer at home, you know, with all the different sporting events that are coming up and all the different outlets that's been created by ESPN and ABC and CBS and all the major networks. They're all content driven and you know, it's not unusual, say for instance, to do a Duke game that's maybe only on ESPN3, or you know, it may end up generating up to ESPNU, or maybe even to the Mothership as we refer to it, or even to the network end. And in some cases the REMI piece works well with international. Like this past year, I had a chance to work with the folks and doing an international show for Fox that we integrated some of the REMI activities over Fox for their international soccer feed and that worked well.

Frederick: So physical proximity to the actual event is less critical than ever has been before.

Lowery: Absolutely and you know with a lot of the LTN distribution and interacting pieces say like with what I mean by LTN is actually a company that makes these particular boxes that can push stuff right over the Internet. ESPN is now starting to use a lot of stuff to where they may have like a 50 mag internet box that you're playing up a full broadcast to and you may have embedded audio and tied them with video. You just plug that right up to a box and it's been delivered to national networks

Frederick: In real time.

Lowery: In real time. The latency between that is in nanoseconds now. It's like almost less than a quarter second, essentially, and so the interaction pieces between that is working extremely well, and you know, LTM boxes are great, satellite companies and uplink companies are starting to

lose a lot of business, so you're not really seeing a lot of data. You're starting to see a little turn in that wave of participation between satellite companies because as long as the internet is a thing that is a huge game-changer.

Litty: I think that the development of fiber optics, and its impact cannot be overstated at all on broadcast.

Frederick: Because it allows better quality of audio-video and a different way of producing it?

Litty: It's the speed and the capacity of fiber optics that allows all of this.

Lowery: Yeah, fiber and now internet is starting to kind of get an equal to a lot of the fiber and as time progresses you will start seeing things grow from 720, 1080 to 4K, as time progresses. And that's kind of some of the things that I see are changing.

Frederick: That's both in the transmission and the receiving of the audio ingredient.

Lowery: Absolutely. Don't get me wrong. We are still using the big 53-foot expandable tractor trailers that are doing these big productions to where you're having the 10, 15 camera shows or more. It's not unusual to do one of those shows this week and next week you turn around and you do a four-camera show out of a small 16-foot track, or maybe you have a tri-cast or some small gear that say like for instance that a conference is providing and you're putting on a production for them and it's being pushed to ESPN over the internet. That's not unusual.

Robin Cummings, Chancellor: This is Chancellor Robin Cummings and I want to thank you for listening to 30 Brave Minutes. Our faculty and students provide expertise, energy and passion, driving our region forward. Our commitment to Southeast North Carolina has never been stronger through our teaching, our research and our community outreach. I want to encourage you to consider making a tax deductible contribution to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. With your help, we will continue our impact for generations to come. You can donate online at uncp.edu/give. Thanks again for listening. Now back to more 30 Brave Minutes.

Frederick: You are listening to 30 Brave Minutes, a broadcast service of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. I'm Jeff Frederick. We are talking about television and broadcasting today and my guests are Jamie Litty, Cle Cousins, Sally Ann Clark and Chuck Lowery. So let's set technology aside for a brief second. How else is news gathering and content production changed?

Litty: I don't think you can set technology aside. Actually. I mean, I think that's where the biggest changes came in and those did usher in changes in labor, of course, but I think the basic story forms have not changed much.

Cousins: I agree. Technology is the game changer. Even when I worked in Florida, I remember, and that was in the early 2000s, we had robotic cameras. So, technology eliminated camera people on the floor in the studio.

Frederick: So they were motion-activated or voice-activated cameras?

Cousins: From a remote control.

Lowry: It was really fun when they first started coming out with that technology. Some of the robotics would start running into one another during the middle of a news show.

Litty: They still do that. I love to watch the bloopers from overseas, like the BBC uses robotically programmed cameras and they get off-track, and pan to the wrong element. It's a lot of fun.

Frederick: What about the twenty-four hour news cycle? Obviously technology made that possible, both in the production side of it and in the viewing of it, but how has that changed what the expectations of TV and what the expectations of production are?

Cousins: I worked for a 24 hour station. I worked at News 14 in Raleigh and it is different. I think for the viewer at home, as I said, when I was a little girl, we gathered around the TV at six o'clock as a family to watch. Yeah, now you can get news every day all the time, so it changed the dynamics of how the family even watches TV.

Litty: I think those kinds of stations or channels are the exception to the rule though. You know, I don't think the broadcast news gathering has changed that much "given a 24-hour news cycle" because the so-called cable news networks don't spend much time on actual newscasts. They're full of talk shows now with pundits and politicians and other public officials or broadcast personalities, who are constantly yelling at each other and interrupting each other. And the bread and butter of TV news is still being made at local TV stations or a Statewide Network like News 14 is, right? It was started by Time Warner and then Spectrum I picked it up. So, you know, I suppose we have seen stations adding newscasts to their days, but I wouldn't say that gives us any greater quantity of news because they repeat a lot of stories from one day part to the next and now that TV stations in any given Market are allowed to share management, we see one station providing the news operation for another in the very same city. So you might have your ABC affiliate doing their 11 p.m. news every week night, but they are also producing the 10 p.m. news for their Fox affiliate and it might be a little flashier or a little irreverent the way they do it on the 10 p.m. but if you stick around for the 11:00 p.m. on their sister station, it's the same content.

Frederick: So repetition both within channels and in multiple channels. The 24-hour news cycle. Maybe we don't actually produce 24 hours' worth of news. We just produce the same amount

and just keep repackaging it. It is all the opinion just sort of that much easier to produce? It's a person on the air available from a remote site...

Clark: It's cheap. It's so cheap.

Lowery: And you know the technology piece that has kind of made this help in staying up to date with some of the technology is that in dealing with upgrading these packages in the 24 hour stories, there's a lot of blocks that they don't even redo. They just freshen up a block and that content keeps cycling.

Cousins: They actually call it the wheel. When I worked at News 14, they asked us. The producers would say what do you have for the wheel? It was continuously, you know, same story same thing over and over and you would stick something in new when you got it, but it kept revolving.

Litty: Right, and then all-news radio in the 80s, right, we would maybe freshen the lead sentence for when the story next airs, or you would choose a different sound byte to go with the same event you covered, or issue or story that you covered so you would find a way to freshen it up and like Chuck says, I do watch Today and I see that they rerun you know the exact same newscast maybe freshen up the weather, of course.

Lowery: They do. It is, you know, like dealing with sports pieces, you know how fresh the sports pieces they're always upgrading. Every 10 minutes they want to do something fresh or every half hour. And whenever I used to do a lot of the ESPN stuff, that's all we would do. Yeah, you might be live for a block and then grow the other blocks or different blocks and then he'd come back for another live piece. And you know, for a half-hour show, you may see the talent maybe two minutes. The other three different blocks that might be five minutes apiece was fresh and live but was covered up with b-roll and then you'd wait until two hours later to freshen it up again.

Frederick: How do news decision-makers straddle the fine line between ratings and serving the public or do they even distinguish between those two?

Cousins: Well, I used to be an assistant news director. Ratings do matter because it's how you pay the bills, how you pay your employees, but I always thought you still had to approach news from an ethical standpoint and try to give the public the news it needs. But of course, you know you want to beat your competition. So you want to put out the best product. So I would always tell reporters to try to have the best writing or announcing or whatever to beat the competition, but not really sell your soul to the devil or anything to get the ratings.

Litty: Honestly, broadcast news is a lot different than the entertainment division. So what are we talking about, when we talk about broadcasters, right? I mean I still think news departments have a lot of cushion or a kind of firewall, even though of course they have to be concerned whether they have the most ratings compared to their competitors in the same market, but if you look at the entertainment programming, they don't even let shows with the network last more than one episode if they don't hit the ratings that they promised advertisers. You see shows that they're pulled after one. The risk is too high. They'd rather replace it with reruns that sell better. So I think broadcast news is different than broadcast entertainment. I guess broadcast news still gets a pass in a lot of ways.

Cousins: It's still rough. Yeah, when you come into work and your news director has been fired and the new director is at the hotel. That happened to me in Florida, with our ratings. We went through a lot of news directors. They are like professional football coaches.

Clark: After all the losses.

Cousins: Yeah, you can't lose but so long, you know. So I always said it's not a business for people who didn't really love it because any day you could go in and management has been told to change, which could impact your own job.

Frederick: Is that because we get access to daily ratings? Is that because it's not only a 24-hour news cycle but a 24-hour evaluation cycle within an individual TV station or within an individual Media Company?

Litty: Well, the smaller markets don't get daily ratings.

Cousins: No. Not all markets.

Litty: Actually they get quarterly ratings reports. Yes, and then, of course four times a year, there's what's called the sweeps, where most of the markets are monitored by a diary system. And when those reports come out, it's like Cle said someone's head could be on the chopping block, but I still think substantively the news kind of stays the same and that when they do make changes, they're sort of trivial or surface level and I don't know if Cle would agree. You might do something flashy at 6 now or a special segment or you've got more expensive weather graphics.

Cousins: Or the investigative piece.

Frederick: The Super-duper Doppler...

Litty: Right. And so I guess you might bring in younger talent. I don't know.

Cousins: Well, when I was in broadcasting, working for TV stations, TV stations put money into research and once we had a focus group and it showed us that people responded that they wanted more good news, and we had a segment called Good News which to me was stupid because in reality people really did not want. No one flips the channel and stops at the station where, you know, the club is planting flowers at the park. That is not sensational enough. So sometimes they get it wrong. I thought this was a time that the station got it wrong and the research did not really reflect what people thought.

Litty: Because focus groups are soft science. I teach focus group methodology. I run focus groups, but they are probably the softest social science methods and yet TV stations use focus group methodology a lot and the sample is not representative. It's not generalizable. You just get a lot of rich data and people tell their stories and justify their answers, but, for sure they can get it wrong. Do you remember it was focus groups that decided that television personality Christine Craft was too old and didn't defer to men and it ended up being a precedent-setting or landmark lawsuit on sex discrimination in broadcasting.

Frederick: So they'll gather research in one way or another on everything from what kind of stories to what kind of neckties someone should wear.

Litty: Absolutely.

Frederick: So that probably serves the interest perhaps more of the ratings, but perhaps not so much of the actual viewers themselves. What trends are you guys keeping an eye on in television or in broadcasting in general? What's new that you like? What's new that you're suspicious of?

Clark: The movement of internet to TV. That's where we're going.

Cousins: And as far as broadcast journalism, I teach students that now you have to be a journalist who can report on multiple platforms. When I was trained, you know, you were trained as a newspaper reporter or a broadcast reporter, but since the internet, you have to know how to write in print form. You have to know how to write in conversational form for your story that will actually be aired, so in a way the internet is requiring broadcast reporters to have even more skills, you know to be able to write across multiple platforms because every TV station has a website every newspaper has a website, you know.

Litty: Our field is increasingly IT related.

Clark: Exactly.

Litty: So students have to learn more and more about file formats and codex and servers and you know Cle just mentioned the convergence on the web of previously disparate kind of skills and forms, but what strikes me now is that they also have to learn how to do open captions or closed

captions on their videos. Right? Right, so that's another skill, where before it was it was enough to say well now you need to learn video because we have to put your video story on the website. Well now guess what? You have to learn to open caption that video for our website.

Cousins: Yeah, because of ADA laws and such.

Frederick: Anything else that you're noticing on the horizon out there?

Lowery: I think with the changing technology in dealing with broadcasting and being able to deliver it, the internet is playing a big part of it. I know whenever internet really first came along they were calling it the Super Highway. We all know what that is now. But you know with HTSC1.0 that we're living in now that created HD from analog because we went from 480 to 720 and now 1080. I think in time with the FCC, they're really looking hard at what 3.0 looks like in terms of being able to create a platform, an IP platform that television as well as the internet will all be delivered to your household. And with that being said, it's going to be able to create more and more different platforms to be delivered to the home and through your handset or your television. I think TVs will still exist for a long time that I think in time the television is going to change. Pretty much like the old CRT and your flat screen went through. I think you're going to see another, in time, another evolution happen and I think it's within the next half a decade to decade that you're going to probably start seeing these things change. It really depends on how the FCC is going to interpret a lot of that.

Frederick: So with all these changes in capability and technology and the ratings piece that is sort of omnipresent out there, how does the industry regulate itself? How does it correct practices that push too far too quickly or would you say "does it regulate itself?"

Lowery: In my opinion technology wise, I think the regulation happens with the subscriber themselves because I don't care how great it is, if they don't want it or they don't want to pay for it, they're not going to have it.

Frederick: They vote with their wallets.

Lowery: Yeah, they kind of vote with their wallets in my opinion, because you know, there's a point to where the consumer goes, "Okay, that's enough. I don't need to be able to see a pixel and hold it up to my eye and be able to see every little part of it. I just want to know that it looks good."

Litty: In terms of content, of course, the industry does not regulate itself. But over the last 20 years, gosh actually since the 80s, the whole atmosphere of deregulation has meant that broadcasting can push and push the envelope in terms of content and they're going to get a pass based on you know first amendment protections for content.

Frederick: In broadcasting, particularly on the news side or for that matter even on the sports side are the lines clear enough between opinion and reporting? What could be done about that, if anything should be done?

Cousins: I think Dr. Litty made a great point when she talked about now so many of the news stations have these opinion shows and some people watch those shows and they confuse that with news. Back in the day, if a television station, for example, had a commentator on, that section was clearly labeled commentary and I think in those ways the lines have been blurred and I'd like to see a little more separation again.

Frederick: Okay, final question. Make a bold prediction about something that will reshape the broadcast or television landscape sometime in the next half a dozen years.

Clark: Going back to my answer earlier, internet TV. We are working with a now generation. They want everything now, therefore they are getting their news and other things from social media, tweets.

Cousins: Yeah, it is amazing how many young people don't get their news from traditional television.

Clark: They don't wait for the 12 or 6 o'clock news anymore, like we used to sit around and wait.

Litty: I think terrestrial-over-the-air broadcasting is going to cede their birthright in entertainment programming to the internet providers. And I think that those traditional kinds of stations will survive in the form of time dependent spectacles that traditional television does well, sporting events, awards shows, big musical and dance competitions that don't have rerun value, game shows strike me as being similar and so the country will never abandon terrestrial over the air broadcasting. That wouldn't even be safe, you know, national security wise, but what those stations carry might end up being slim pickings and you're going to see comedies, dramas, and the so-called made-for-TV movie. That is all moving to internet protocol as the delivery platform.

Lowery: Well, I think you know technology-wise there's going to be several big things in my mind that's going to change. I think LED technology is going to be a big one. I think even the NDI technology is just kind of like in its beginning and then part of that technology helps you deliver television and receive broadcast over the internet and be able to switch a show if you're sitting in one location, and be able to look at cameras in different locations as tied into an IP network, and that can be a closed system like a piece of fiber or it can be a network system like our school system that we currently have or any in-house system that you have multiple platforms of cameras, even down to a phone camera, and that's probably tied into the internet. I

think you can see that. I think going forward you will see technology change. Should the 3.0 grow I think, audio-wise, I think audio being delivered to you is going to get so much better, so much clarity. I know you probably go, well, right now, it's pretty darn good, but no, it'll even get better and I think with the emergence of our delivery system with broadcasting you will start seeing a change in how emergency services are delivered to the household too via the broadcast areas. So, to me, I see a lot of changes in those areas. And to me it is very fascinating and I think we're still on the beginning of a lot of big things happening.

Frederick: So on a podcast about television broadcasting you're telling us all to stay tuned.

All: Yes.

Frederick: So I apologize for that terrible joke, but I thank the panel: Jamie, Cle, Sally Ann, and Chuck for a great discussion of broadcasting and the future of television as well. Tune in next time for another interesting discussion right here on 30 Brave Minutes.

Gay: Today's podcast was edited by Richard Gay and transcribed by Janet Gentes. Theme music created by Reilly Morton. This content is copyrighted by the University of North Carolina at Pembroke UNCP and the College of Arts and Sciences. It is to be used for educational and non-commercial purposes only and to not be changed, altered or used for any commercial endeavor without the express written permission of authorized representatives of UNCP. The views and opinions expressed by any individuals during the course of these discussions are their own and do not necessarily represent the views, opinions, and positions of UNCP or any of its subsidiary programs, schools, departments, and divisions. While reasonable efforts have been made to ensure that information discussed is current and accurate at the time of release neither UNCP nor the individual presenting the material makes any warranty that information presented in the original recording has remained accurate due to advances in technology, research, or industry standards. Thanks for listening to 30 Brave Minutes and Go Braves!

Frederick: Good job everybody.