

## Regional

# Maynard teaches art of journalism, television

From the time TV started to become a staple in American homes in the post-World War II era, many things about it have changed. Much of the change has come about through rapid improvements in technology, but content – particularly in journalism – has changed as well. Someone who witnessed these changes and who teaches the techniques of contemporary mass media is Riley Maynard, a professor in the department of mass communications at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Most of his students, he said, do not realize the tremendous transformation that has occurred in the TV industry.

“I remember the first time I ever saw a TV. It was for Eisenhower’s inauguration,” Maynard said. “My father took me to a friend’s house and we watched it. I was in awe. But to explain this feeling to my students would be like asking them if they remember the first time they saw a toaster. It’s just a part of their lives now.”

Born in Matewan, W.Va., Maynard obtained his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in journalism from West Virginia University and his doctorate in American studies from St. Louis University. His rural upbringing, he acknowledged, helped to guide him to a media career.

“That is one of the reasons I went into media,” he said. “As a small boy, deep in the forests of West Virginia, my link to the outside world was television and radio. And I wanted to do that, cover events like a reporter, the inaugurations and other important things. So in that sense I’ve had my dream come true.” He said that he agrees that media tend to pay much more attention to the negative stories.

“I tell my students to think about how probably 40,000 to 50,000 cars go across the Poplar Street Bridge every day, and that’s remarkable if you think about it. But if only one car goes off the bridge and into the river, that would be the story on the news,” he said. “It is the nature of our business.”

Another big change from the “Golden



Photo courtesy of Mike Cathey

Professor Riley Maynard teaching students the art of video journalism.

Age” of TV in the 1950s is the fact that at the beginning all television was live, with, as Maynard pointed out, no margin for error.

“I used to love live television, because you got to see who was good and who wasn’t,” Maynard said. “And if you made a mistake, everybody saw it. We wouldn’t let people live that down. If you made a mistake, you would be reminded of it, and

so therefore there was less boasting and bragging because you put it on the line every day. You didn’t have to boast about how good you were. It was very obvious, and the thing that I think has lowered the quality of news today, more than anything, is the one-man-band journalism. You cannot do it all by yourself and do a really outstanding job.” The content of the news

has also changed, and, for Maynard, not all for the best.

“There was a time when broadcasters such as Walter Cronkite were so respected,” Maynard said. “At some point when he criticized the Vietnam War it was not because of partisan politics, but out of personal responsibility. That led Lyndon Johnson to say, ‘If I lost Cronkite, I lost

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middle America.’ I would say actually that the majority of journalism now is advocacy journalism or aimed at a goal and ignores any evidence to the contrary.”

In addition to his work in journalism and teaching, Maynard has an interesting personal story. Both sides of his family are related to either the Hatfields or the McCoys, of feud fame. He said that he has seen how stereotypes play a major role in the media depicting people from West Virginia as backwards.

“Here is a stereotype you do not get about West Virginia,” Maynard said. “We consistently have the lowest crime rate in the nation, year after year, and you never hear about that.”

Preparing students to be 21st century media workers, Maynard has to keep up to date in an industry where technology is evolving constantly.

“I have been going to technology conferences and I am trying to flip what they are talking about,” he said. “I want to maybe go to the Aspen conference next year and say that we don’t have any money in education. The states don’t have any money, the federal government doesn’t have any money, but Apple was the most profitable company in the world and I want to talk to the people at Apple, Oracle, Cisco and Microsoft and say, ‘You should be paying us to teach people how to use your equipment, and you should be giving us the computers and the software. Let’s flip the equation.’”

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