

# TV Consumer Course Aimed At Developing Awareness In The Viewing Audience

By Barbara Baker  
Dr. Robert Schrag teaches a consumerism course at N. C. State University, an occurrence not remarkable in today's value-conscious society. What makes Schrag's course a bit out of the ordinary is that the product his students are learning to consume is television programming. Schrag, an assistant professor in NCSU's Department of Speech-Communication, believes that it is important for his studies - and the population at large - to develop "skills in TV consumerism."

When he began his career at another school, Schrag taught television production courses. But he became concerned that his students were not aware of the potential social impact of the programs they were producing.

It was then that he shifted his emphasis from teaching how to produce programs to teaching how to watch them critically and determine what implicit and covert messages they were getting across.

He came to NCSU two years ago because the school was seeking someone with an interest in rhetorical and media criticism. He now teaches three media courses as part of the speech-communication department's track in telecommunications. His courses on entertainment and information media are electives and are also open to non-majors.

Schrag feels the courses are important because television is such a pervasive influence in our lives. "Ninety-eight percent of

homes in this country have televisions - more than have indoor plumbing. The average home has the television on six hours a day. It's very seductive," he commented.

Despite its role in our lives, most of us give little serious thought to what we are watching, and that's where the need for consumer skills arises, Schrag said.

"When you read a novel, you know what you're dealing with. It's a continuous message in which there is often an implied social impact," he commented. "But with television, you might watch an Andy Griffith rerun, then the news, then a game show and then a 'MASH' rerun - all in the same experiential frame. But we tend to watch uncritically instead of shifting gears."

Schrag said that some programs like "MASH", "Lou Grant", "Barney Miller" and "Taxi" say

significant things about society, but we haven't trained our audiences to interact critically with television and demand more programming of that caliber. As a result, he feels the medium hasn't lived up to its potential.

The teachers cited several reasons for the lack of discriminating viewing. The first is the educational community itself, which traditionally has refused to treat television with the serious analysis that is now common in the study of films.

He also pointed a finger at professional television critics, whose constant complaining about the poor quality in the medium does little to encourage good programming.

"Critics tend to be 'critical,'" Schrag said. "They certainly shouldn't be mouthpieces for the television industry, but their carping stance creates an adversary relationship

between the audience and producers."

Finally, Schrag pointed to viewer activist groups like the PTA, ACT for Children's Television, or the Moral Majority's Coalition for Better Television, whose approach is to pressure for removal of certain types of programs.

Instead, Schrag suggested that they would be more effective if they tried "rational advocacy criticism," an approach which attempts to insure the success of worthwhile programs.

The process involves selecting programs that have something important to say and that have a rational chance of being a commercial success, then working to see that they remain on the air.

"A good show that is also popular will continue to build an audience and perhaps even spawn copies of spin-offs, until that type of program becomes the rule

rather than the exception," he explained.

Schrag suggested that advocacy groups sponsor screenings and discussion groups to generate interest in worthwhile programs. He said that production companies would probably gladly lend a helping hand, since the idea is to insure the success of the program.

Besides the fact that he thinks the advocacy approach could be more effective than trying to ban allegedly harmful shows, Schrag believes it is also more in line with first amendment principles.

"We can't hold the networks responsible for what our children watch. You can't advocate getting government out of our lives and freedom of choice on the one hand, then turn around and advocate that the networks be responsible for the content of television," he stated.

What programs does Schrag advocate? Among others he cited the popular and critically acclaimed "MASH" and the less herald-

ed "Bosom Buddies." "MASH" functions as a behavioral model. Improbable situations don't occur, and solutions to problems don't always occur. It offers a social commentary, a model of how we can act with one another.

"The characters are in hell, and there is no rational reason for them to act humanely - but they do. They're saying we're our own excuse for humanity," Schrag said.

Schrag feels so strongly about the value of "MASH" that he is planning to teach an entire seminar on the program next summer.

"Bosom Buddies," which has just been revived by ABC, says some very positive things about human relationships and growing up. It also presents a realistic portrayal of a genuine friendship between two men, Schrag said.

He confessed a personal preference for comedies, saying we "don't need examples of how to take ourselves more seriously."

He takes comedy seriously, however, and believes it should reflect the humor in how people interact in the real world.

He does not rate the popular "Dukes of Hazzard" highly because it lacks a basis in reality. But he doesn't discount it to totally. In fact, he says it can be therapeutic.

"It can be decent, mind rot television or low-level media abuse for the consenting adult who knows what he's getting into. That's all right," Schrag commented. "But there are two and three-year olds who

are more attuned to life in Hazzard County than to life in Cary.

Schrag also takes his media courses seriously, and students are expected to do extensive reading, write analytical papers and participate in classroom discussion on their ways to becoming more critical television consumers. And sometimes they are assigned to watch television.

Assigned? That's right. Schrag said he has found that as a rule, college students don't watch much TV.

## COA To Offer Scholarship In Memory Of Mr. White

Area high school graduates may apply for a new scholarship at College of The Albemarle. Lloyd Armstrong, student financial aid director said a private scholarship has been established in memory of Robert Jennings White.

Armstrong said students from high schools in any of the seven counties served by COA or those who have received their General Educational Development (GED) certificates from the college may apply. He said students who parents are or have been employees of the Carolina Telephone and Telegraph Company will be given preference, however, it is not a restrictive requirement for eligibility.

Carolina Telephone and Telegraph Company.

After serving in the U. S. Marine Corps from 1944 until 1946, he returned to the telephone company. At the time of his death in 1960, he was in charge of operation, repair and installation of in-plant equipment in all of the company's exchanges.

White was a member of First United Methodist Church, and taught the Young Adult class. A Mason, he was a member of

Eureka Lodge Number 317 A.F. and A.M. He held a number of offices, including Illustrious Master of Tyrian Council Number 19, and District Deputy Grand High Priest.

He was an active member of the local ham radio operators' club. His early childhood interest in electricity served as the basis for his career in communications.

## CHICKEN MANURE

For Sale - Bag or bulk. Will consider delivery. Call Emmett Winborne - 221-4204.

Nov. 19, chg.

## SHAW Enterprises

- Services Include:
- HOME APPLIANCE REPAIRS
  - HOME REPAIRS
  - VINYL SIDING

Route 3, Box 221 Edenton  
Call 482-4502

Specializing In Custom Exhaust & Muffler Work

Albemarle Auto Parts

N. Broad St. 482-3384

**IMPORTANT NEWS FOR BACKACHE SUFFERERS!**

**MOMENTUM® Tablets are 50% stronger than Doan's.**

Before you take Doan's Pills for muscular backache, remember this: MOMENTUM Tablets are 50% stronger than Doan's. That means MOMENTUM gives you 50% more pain reliever per dose to relieve backache.

To reduce pain, soothe inflammation so muscles loosen - you can move more freely in minutes! There's no stronger backache medication you can buy without a prescription than MOMENTUM Tablets. Take only as directed.

White, better known to local residents as Bobbie, was a native of Pasquotank County. He was the son of Robert Fulton and Bertha Mann Jennings White, born on June 2, 1925.

He attended first through fifth grades at Central High School, and graduated from Elizabeth City High School in 1942. Following graduation, White was employed as a switchboard installer by the Norfolk and

# TG&Y family centers

EDENTON VILLAGE SHOPPING CENTER

TG&Y's policy is to always have advertised merchandise in adequate supply in our stores. In the event the advertised merchandise is not available due to unforeseen reasons, TG&Y will provide a Rain Check, upon request, in order that the merchandise may be purchased at the sale price when it becomes available, or you may purchase similar quality merchandise at a similar price reduction. It is the policy of TG&Y to see that you are happy with your purchases. It is TG&Y's policy to be priced competitively in the market. Regular Sale Prices may vary market by market, but the sale price will always be as advertised. We will be happy to refund your money if you are not satisfied with your purchase. VISA® and MasterCard® accepted.

# Pre - Christmas Clearance



**Belk Tyler**  
downtown edenton

Sale! Men's Famous Name Shirts! Save Over 7.00!

SELECT GROUP! **16.88**

THE CHOICE OF CHAMPIONS

The tradition of a Lacoste®. There's more to it than just the alligator emblem trademark. This Izod® Lacoste shirt is engineered of pure cotton to breathe and stretch with you. Its ribbed collar and cuffs to stay neat. And its extra-long shirttail keeps it in one position when you change yours. The Izod® Lacoste® 2-button placket front shirt. Make it your choice, too. S, M, L, XL. Regular 24.00.

Shop 9:30 A.M. Until 9:00 P.M. Until Christmas.

**Christmas Decorations**

**1/2 Price**

**Electronic Games**

**25% Off**

**Famous Brand Watches**

**29.95**

Values To 80.00

Benrus, Helbros, Jules Jergensen, Elgin, and Many Others

**SELECTED GROUPS**

Up To **50% Off!**

Regular Price Selected Group Of Toys, Electronics And More

Pronto Sonar One Step Camera

**\$35.00**

Reg. 83.88

**POLAROID**

**Coats 1/2 Price**

Infants Ladies Girls Boys Mens

**Mens & Ladies Cowboy Boots**

**1/2 Price**

**Stereo Turntable 8-Track AM/FM Radio**

No. 9072

**\$88.88**