

Media panel debates: "What's News?"

by Marla L. Kent

Arguments over whether television is "news" sparked debate among panelists in print and broadcast journalism at a panel discussion held on Sept. 5. "TV by nature is a fraud...TV distorts us," said Sandy Sarobin of KYW radio.

The panel discussion entitled "What's News: Choosing What the Public Should Know," centered around whether broadcast journalism, mainly television, gave the public "news" or just headlines of the news. Also discussed was what is news and media as a business.

The panel debated whether the mass media are messengers or social reformers. Terri Guerrisi, assignment editor for WHP-TV, said that elements of social reform are present in the mass media. Sandy Sarobin, KYW radio, said, "If you perform your job as a journalist, you are definitely a social reformer." According to Dale Davenport, city editor of the Harrisburg Patriot, moral code and ethics, fairness and accuracy are the necessary ingredients when giving an honest accounting of the news.

The discussion included, panelists Dale Davenport of the Harrisburg Patriot and Evening

News; Terri Guerrisi, WHP-TV; Tony Romeo, WGAL-TV; and Sandy Sarobin, KYW radio. Moderators of the discussion were humanities faculty members Eton Churchill and Mark S. Guralnick.

Each panelist described what his job titles and responsibilities were and what each of them, through his experience, thought "news" was. Dale Davenport said, "news boils down to four things... consequence, conflict, cash and celebrity." Davenport added, "news is what's unusual... no news is good news." Another panelist said that events that are unusual are the news and most time, it is bad news. According to Guerrisi, "People are fascinated with tragedy... it's part of human nature." All the panelists thought news should have a balance between what people should know and what they want.

The panelists agreed that news has elements of interest, importance and entertainment based on fact. They also agreed that what becomes "news" is usually "bad news." However, some panelists did disagree that "good news" could be considered news.

Other topics discussed were jobs and what a journalist's job consists of. Guerrisi said a journalist's job is to find out what happened and give the public the information. Guerrisi continued, "you (journalists) act like a filter."

Another important topic discussed was whether mass media should be a business. The business factor in TV is selling advertising, in print journalism it's selling news papers. Tony Romeo, reporter for WGAL-TV said, "We are a business...with business operations...we will have constraints." Romeo continued, "News is a business and if you think it isn't entertaining...you're foolish." Romeo pointed out that Media is independent of government but dependent on how many people watch the news and how many papers are sold. Guerrisi added that performance is involved in the business of covering the news.

Sandy Sarobin said, "laziness and disinterest" are shortfalls in covering the news. Sarobin added, "Tough stories are never covered...it's what we don't cover that makes us a disgrace." He added, the role



"What is news?" panel included: (left to right) Dale Davenport, Terri Guerrisi, Mark S. Guralnick, and Sandy Sarobin. Photo by John Drexler

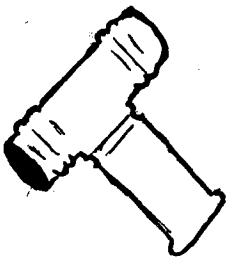
of a journalist should be as an impediment to the slick package of disinformation. Guerrisi defended television by saying that TV doesn't report events the same way. She also said, "they are totally different mediums."

Guerrisi stressed the positive side of TV. She said that TV is more timely than print journalism and TV can show what

is being talked about with graphics. According to Guerrisi she doesn't believe that TV is headlines but rather a capsulized version of the news and if people want more detail a series on the specific topic is done.



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