

A Look at Current Trends in Media Education in the U.S.

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Abstract

This paper presents a "snapshot" of present trends in media education in the U.S. Results from a June 2003 survey of (U.S) member institutions of the Broadcast Education Association are discussed. Topics include the variety of program structures, budgeting, student/teacher ratios, staff size, curricular trends, internships and placement rates. The paper also examines the changes in preparation of students entering programs of study in the electronic media, and the challenges that presents for media educators.

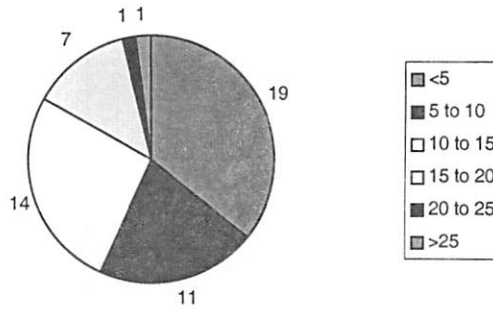
This paper presents the results of a brief survey conducted in June 2003. The respondents to the survey were all member institutions of the Broadcast Education Association. Emails were sent to the U.S. based member institutions requesting their participation in the survey, by directing them to a website where the fifteen questions were posted. The survey design was predominantly "check boxes" or drop down menus. The brevity of the survey and easy response design were efforts to encourage participation. Of the 194 emails sent, 53 usable responses were obtained, for a 27.3% response rate. Thus in the conclusion of this paper, we will present a "snapshot" of contemporary media higher education in the United States, and close by suggesting a changing paradigm for its future.

The titles of the responding programs represent a wide range of variations within the communication disciplines. Fourteen (14) departments were known as "communications," nine (9) contained the word "broadcasting" (usually combined with another descriptor, e.g. "Broadcast Electronic Media Arts," "Broadcast and Cinematic Arts," etc.), eight (8) included "journalism" in their titles, seven (7) included "electronic media" in their titles, five (5) were called "mass communications," and two (2) were known as "telecommunications." Other program titles that were reported included "digital media arts," "motion picture and recording arts," and "media studies."

Nine (9) of the institutions offer an "associate" degree, with six (6) of those nine offering the associate degree exclusively, therefore defining them as what we will call "two-year programs." Forty (40) schools reported offering a "bachelors" or "baccalaureate" degree. Thirty-seven (37) of those institutions offer the "bachelor of arts," while thirteen (13) offer the "bachelor of science" degree. Eleven institutions offered both the BA and the BS degrees; so

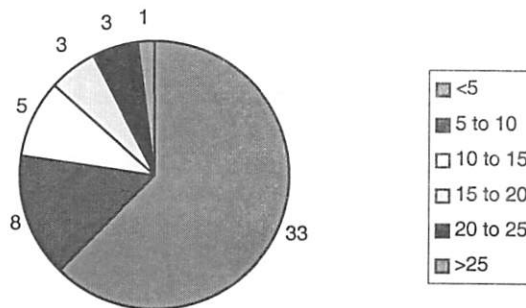
only two institutions offered the BS degree exclusively. Twenty-one (21) offered a "masters" degree, seven (7) offered a Ph.D., and two (2) offered the "master of fine arts" degree.

Nineteen (19) or thirty-six percent (36%) of the responding institutions reported that the number of instructors is fewer than five (5). Eleven (11) or twenty-one percent (21%) of the institutions have five to ten (5-10) instructors. Fourteen (14) or twenty-six percent (26%) institutions have ten to fifteen (10-15) instructors. Seven institutions (7) or thirteen percent (13%) reported having fifteen to twenty (15-20) instructors. One institution reported twenty to twenty-five (20-25) instructors, and one reported more than twenty-five (25) instructors. Thus, we may conclude that most programs operate with fewer than ten full-time instructors.



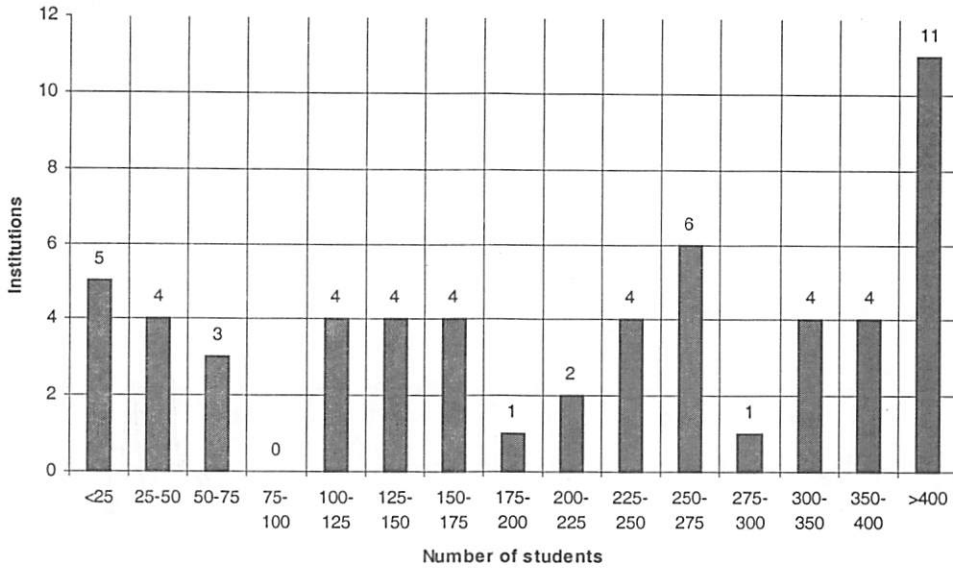
Number of Full Time Instructors

The vast majority, thirty-three (33) or sixty-two percent (62%), of the institutions reported employing five (5) or fewer part-time instructors. Eight (8) schools, or fifteen percent (15%), reported five to ten (5-10) part-time instructors; five (5) or less than ten percent (10%) reported ten to fifteen (10-15) part-timers; and three (3) each, or about five percent (5%), reported both fifteen to twenty (15-20) and twenty to twenty-five (20-25) part-time instructors. Only one institution reported employing more than twenty-five (25) part-time instructors.

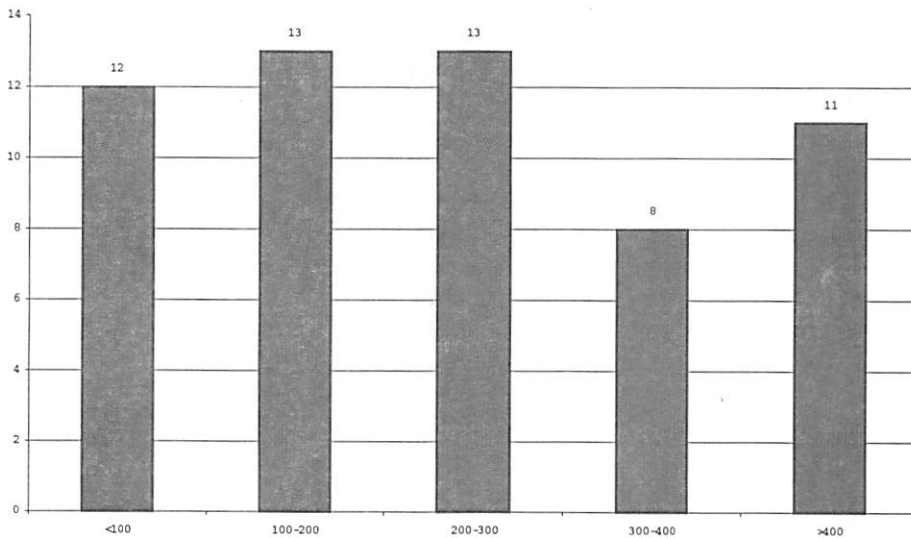


Part Time Instructors

Eleven (11) of the schools, nearly twenty one percent (21%), report enrollments of more than four hundred (400) undergraduate students. This response represents the mode in this measure. The median response was two hundred to two hundred twenty-five (200-225) students, which also represents the approximate mean undergraduate enrollment.



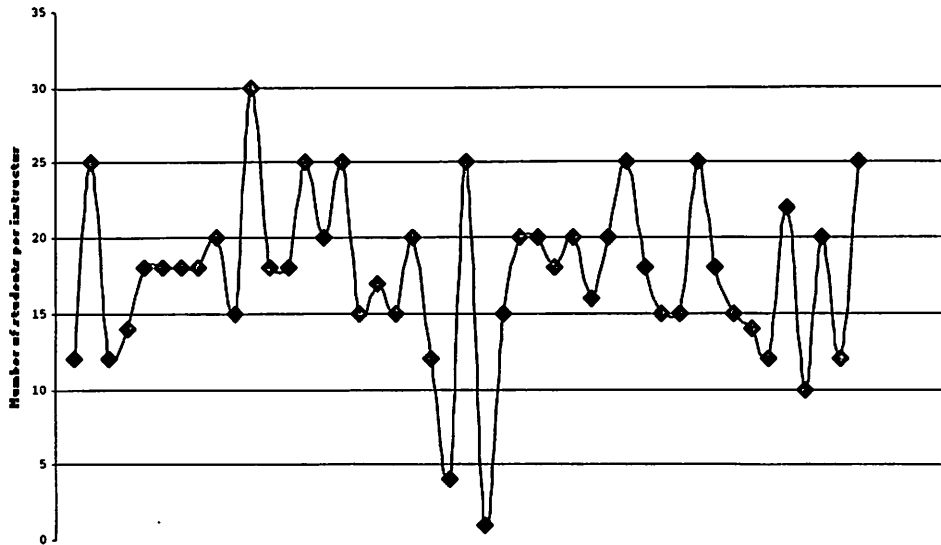
When we adjust the data to reflect groupings according to “century marks,” or at each “one-hundred” break, we see a fairly uniform distribution according to program size.



Twenty-two (22) of the institutions responded with graduate enrollment statistics. The

range of numbers of graduate students was from ten (10) to one hundred thirty-one (131). The most common response was twenty-five graduate students and the median response was thirty (30). The average number of graduate students was forty-three (43).

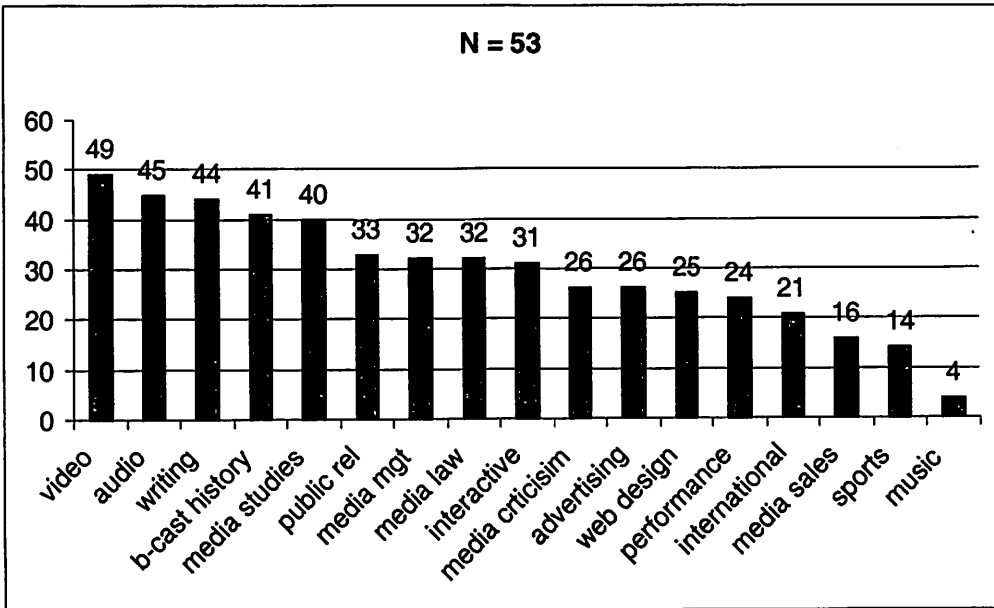
When asked about “ideal student to instructor ratio,” the open-ended question elicited forty-five responses. The range of responses was from one (1) to thirty (30). Both the median and mode were eighteen (18), and the mean was 17.7. Here we can conclude that according to our respondents, the ideal ratio is considered to be approximately eighteen (18) students to one instructor.



Fifty-one (51) institutions responded to the query regarding coursework offered. Respondents were offered seventeen course selections from which to choose, and the responses are displayed in the following figures:

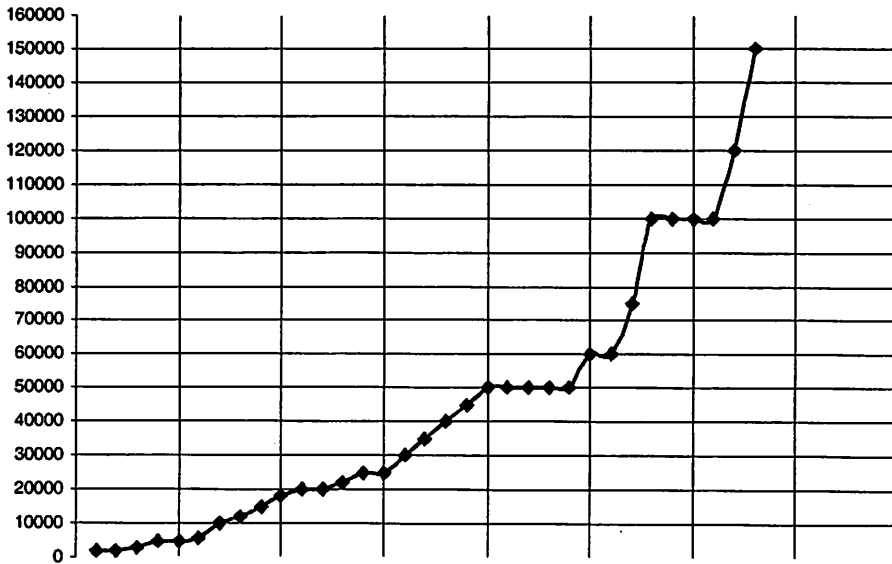
<u>No.</u>	<u>Coursework</u>	<u>%</u>
49	Video	96%
45	Audio	88%
44	Media writing	86%
41	Broadcast history	80%
40	Media studies	78%
33	Public relations	65%
32	Media management	63%
32	Media law	63%
31	Interactive multimedia	61%
26	Media criticism	51%
26	Advertising	51%
25	Web design	49%

24	Media performance	47%
21	International media	41%
16	Media sales	31%
14	Sports broadcasting	27%
4	Music business	8%

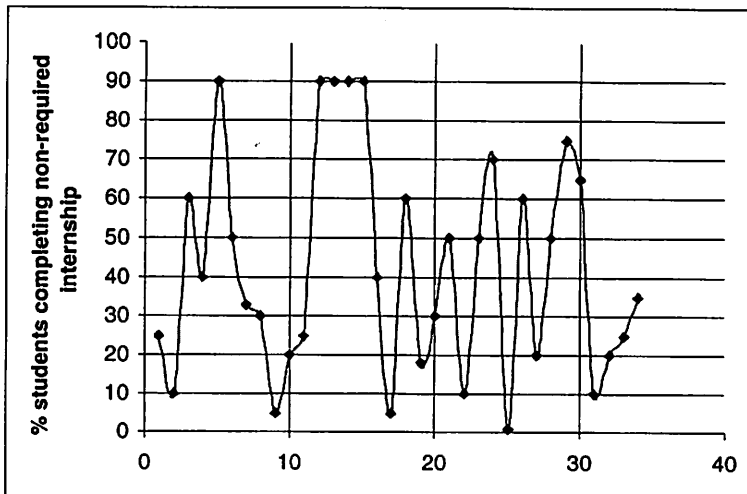


When asked to list "other coursework," not included on this list, thirty institutions offered approximately fifteen areas which can be summarized as follows: film (theory, criticism, and production), photo-journalism, media programming, media research, media policy, facility design, media ethics, print journalism, audiences, organizational communication and speech/rhetoric.

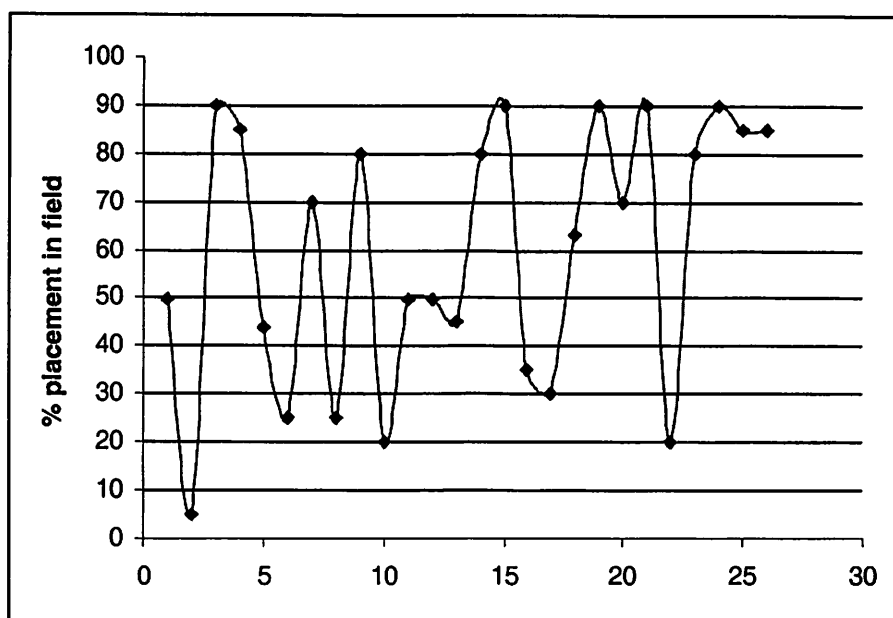
Thirty-five (35) respondents answered the open-ended question regarding departmental budget (not including salaries). The range of operating budgets reported was from \$1500 to \$150,000 U.S. dollars. The most common response (mode) was \$50,000. The median budget figure was \$35,000. The average (mean) budget was \$43,028.57.



Almost exactly one-third (33%) of the responding institutions indicated that they require an internship, and report nearly one hundred percent (100%) completion rates. Of the two-thirds (66%) of the institutions that do not require internships, nearly ninety per cent (90%) indicated that some percentage of their students do complete an internship. Those same responding institutions not requiring an internship indicated that approximately forty percent (40%) of their students complete an internship, with fifty percent (50%) being the most common response (mode) and thirty-four percent (34%) being the median response.



One-half of the institutions surveyed provided estimates of placement rates for their graduates. Responding to the question, "what percentage of your graduates find employment in their field upon graduation," the results yielded the following: the range was from five percent (5%) to ninety percent (90%). The average was approximately fifty-nine percent (59.5%), the most common answer (mode) was ninety percent (90%), and the median response was approximately sixty-six percent (66.5%).



In summarizing the quantitative results obtained through our web-based survey, we may conclude the following based on the frequency of responses: It is difficult to predict undergraduate enrollment. In fact enrollment may be anywhere from fewer than twenty-five students to over four hundred students. A typical media education program in the U.S. offers a Bachelor of Arts degree, and has ten or fewer full-time instructors. Most programs target eighteen-to-one as the ideal student-teacher ratio. The majority of students complete an internship, whether required or not, and the majority of graduates find employment in their field. Most programs offer coursework in video and audio production, broadcast history, media writing and media studies. A typical departmental budget (excluding salaries) is approximately \$50,000 (U.S.).

Let us conclude by suggesting some areas of emerging concern among media educators. An examination of recent agendas from the conferences of the *Broadcast Education Association* suggests that certain key issues are of primary importance to media educators in the twenty-first century. Significant among those issues is the impact of technological innovation on instruction. As noted above, with nearly all programs of study offering some coursework in production, then it is understandable that the role of technology would be viewed as an important consideration.

It is obvious that the rapid pace of change and innovation in media technology presents the dilemma of keeping facilities and equipment up to date. Conventional wisdom suggests that institutions must provide instruction on equipment that is similar to that found in the so-called "real world," if instruction is to be relevant. For several years, this concern has been the focus of many papers and panel discussions at *BEA* conferences, as the rapid evolution of digital and computer-based production technologies has necessitated constant upgrading of hardware and software systems.

While the pace of change seems not to have slowed significantly, the magnitude of innovation may be leveling somewhat, and when combined with the lowered cost of computer equipment and software, has prompted a paradigm shift in the concerns of media production educators. Where once students entering a media education program had little pre-existing exposure to professional production facilities, now a growing percentage of new university students has already learned the basics of audio and video production in their high schools. Increasing numbers of high schools are offering course work in all aspects of media production, using state-of-the-art software, which sometimes exceeds what the university has in place.

Thus we may see our role is changing. Instead of providing basic instruction on the techniques of capturing and editing audio or video materials, as has been the norm for the past five decades, we can expect more of our incoming students to possess those competencies. In fact the proliferation of low-cost desktop audio and video editing systems, and inexpensive high-quality digital cameras and recorders, is reshaping the industry for which we prepare our students. Now our emphasis can and should shift much earlier to related subject areas such as aesthetics, criticism, writing and ethics.

Appendices and exhibits

What is the name or title of your program? _____

What degrees are offered? (check all that apply)

- Associate of Arts _____
- Associate of Science _____
- Bachelor of Arts _____
- Bachelor of Science _____
- Master of Arts _____
- Master of Science _____
- Master of Fine Arts _____
- Doctor of Philosophy _____
- Other _____ (please list) _____

How many full time (tenured and non-tenured) faculty are in your department?

- Less than 5 _____
- 5-10 _____
- 10-15 _____
- 15-20 _____
- 20-25 _____
- More than 25 _____

How many part time faculty teach in your program?

- Less than 5 _____
- 5-10 _____
- 10-15 _____
- 15-20 _____
- 20-25 _____
- More than 25 _____

Approximately how many undergraduate students are in your program?

- Less than 25 _____
- 25 - 50 _____
- 50 - 75 _____
- 75 - 100 _____
- 100 - 125 _____
- 125 - 150 _____
- 150 - 175 _____
- 175 - 200 _____
- 200 - 225 _____
- 225 - 250 _____
- 250 - 300 _____
- 300 - 350 _____
- 350 - 400 _____
- More than 400 _____

What do you consider the ideal teacher to student ratio? _____

Approximately how many undergraduate students will graduate from your program this year?

- Less than 25 _____
- 25 - 50 _____
- 50 - 75 _____
- 75 - 100 _____
- 100 - 125 _____
- 125 - 150 _____
- 150 - 175 _____
- 175 - 200 _____
- 200 - 225 _____
- 225 - 250 _____
- 250 - 300 _____

- 300 - 350 _____
- 350 - 400 _____
- More than 400 _____

Approximately how many graduate students are in your program? _____

In what general areas do you offer course work? (check all that apply)

- Advertising
- Audio Production
- Video Production
- Media Management
- Media Law
- Media Sales
- Media Studies or media theory
- Media Writing
- Public Relations
- Interactive Multimedia Production
- International Media
- Media Performance
- Sports Broadcasting
- Broadcast Journalism
- Web Design
- Media Criticism
- Music Business

Please list any other areas in which you offer coursework: _____

Which of your majors attracts the highest enrollment? _____

What is your department's approximate budget for equipment annually? _____

Do you require an internship? (check yes or no) _____

Approximately what percentage of your students completes an internship? _____

If you have placement statistics or estimates, about what percentage of your graduates typically find employment in their field immediately after graduation? _____



