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Broadcasting And The Philippine Academe

By

Andre S Khan
Country Paper: Broadcasting and the Philippine Academe
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Manila, Philippines

Ladies and gentlemen, good day:

I must confess a feeling of trepidation as I stand here before you. I, in the course of my career as a broadcaster, have had numerous opportunities of talking to groups of people, but this is the first time I am addressing an international gathering of men and women. While I am made to understand that the first rule of public speaking is never to admit feelings of insecurity, I must be candid with you that I am far from being relaxed, calm and self-collected. I can only draw comfort from the fact that the topic on which I am to brief you on today, is one which is very close to my heart and falls within my range of experience.

I am here to tell you about broadcasting in the Philippines, it relationship with the academic sector and the joint projects we have collaborated on in the past several years.

Broadcasting in the Philippines is predominantly private and commercial. There are 308 radio stations and 41 television stations currently servicing the country's 7,000 islands. Of these radio stations, 85 percent are owned by private companies and are managed as business establishments; 7 percent are owned and operated by religious organizations and 8 percent are operated by the government. Of the television stations, 90 percent are in private hands while only 10 percent are owned by the government. All of these stations belong to 97 broadcast companies. And these companies are members of the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkasters sa Pilipinas (Association of Broadcasters in the Philippines or KBP) of which I am the president. The KBP is a private, non-stock, non-profit corporations that exists essentially as a trade association.

The association is managed by an eleven-person board elected annually by the members.
There is a very unique feature found in Philippine broadcasting which I believe has never been duplicated in any other country. This is the privilege of self-regulation tacitly granted by the government to the KBP. Under this principle, the government recognizes the expertise and high sense of responsibility of the broadcasters to draft policies, rules and regulations to govern all aspects of broadcast operations, except that of the granting of permits and licenses to operate. The latter is a right that properly belongs to the state.

Being an industry association, the KBP has been given the task not only to oversee the activities of the broadcast companies, which are its members, but is also responsible for maintaining relationships with industries, institutions and non-government sectors, whose activities impinge on the broadcast industry.

One of these sectors is the academe—especially those universities and colleges offering mass communication or communication arts courses. At present, there are 31 of these educational institutions. With the exception of two schools that offer a specialised curriculum for broadcasting, the rest offer a generalised curriculum whose graduates may join a variety of professions, where proficiency in the communication arts is a requisite, like advertising, and public relations.

Today, these institutions turn out an average of 2,000 graduates every year. Out of these, 20 percent eventually find employment in broadcast companies. While the percentage is relatively low, this is an improvement over the employment percentage rate ten years ago. At that time, there was a distinct resistance from broadcast companies to employ mass communication graduates. Instead, great importance was placed on providing future employees with the necessary in-house and hands-on training, regardless of the prospective employees' academic qualifications. The reason for this resistance was the common observation that the mass communication/communication arts graduates seemed to be completely out of touch with even the basic and practical realities that exist in the world of broadcasting. Further adding to this resistance was the perception that the new graduates tended to impose their academic training and qualifications on those employees who learned their craft the hard way. This created unnecessary tension among the staff—a situation to which the reaction was to block off new mass communication graduates from employment except for the few who responded to the proper orientation demanded by the broadcast companies.

Recognising this counter-productive situation, the KBP met with the deans of institutions with mass communication or communication arts departments and launched a five-point program to properly orient these students. This program involves the following:

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1. Practicum Program

Since most of these institutions did not and still do not have broadcast facilities for their students to practice on, it was agreed that the KBP members would open the doors of their broadcast stations to student trainees. On the other hand, the schools would require their graduating students to complete a practicum requirement lasting an average of 60 hours. Coordinating and assigning students to broadcast stations of their choice would be done by the KBP.

2. Lecture Series

The KBP instituted a twice-yearly lecture series lasting for a minimum of two days for graduating students. During this lecture series, industry experts would discuss various aspects of broadcast operations from management, programming, finance, technical and sales. A necessary requisite in all the lectures was to inform the students of the realities, expectations and demands of broadcasting.

3. Speakers Bureau

The KBP formed a group of broadcast managers to compose a speakers bureau to answer requests for lectures and speakers for academic forums, symposia and seminars.

4. Academic Participation In Broadcast Conferences

Every year, the KBP sponsors manpower training and development seminars and conferences. During the past 10 years, the industry has spent more than eight million pesos (roughly US$400,000) for these programs. The KBP has made it a point to invite mass communication teachers and students to attend these seminars and conferences together with broadcast practitioners. The primary objective of these invitations is to keep the teachers and students updated on the latest developments in the industry.

5. Broadcasters As Teachers

Despite the low rate of hourly compensation that schools offer, the KBP has constantly encouraged KBP members who have the time, experience and expertise, to teach broadcast subjects in these colleges and universities.

This five-point program has already been in place for the past six years and we are slowly feeling the effects in the quality of the communication arts/mass communication graduates that the industry hires. It has become noticeable that there is less "culture shock" encountered by new graduates. When they
join broadcast stations, they are better prepared for the demands of the medium and most importantly, there is an acknowledgement by the graduates of the value of experience in their relationships with broadcast personnel who do not have mass communication degrees but who grew up in the industry and had "paid their dues."

I realise that our experience can only be a start for something better to build on. And I must confess that the primary reason why I decided to join you today is because I wanted to learn more from you and the experiences that you had in your respective countries.

Thank you very much, and again, good day.