COVER Exclusive Interview
PBS’s Jim Lehrer talks about the war, fairness and his new novel

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Dispelling the myth

the journal for journalists
spring 2004
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The Frank W. Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism is proud to publish the second issue of COVER magazine. This award-winning journal celebrates the outstanding work of journalism professionals who hail from and work in the Southwest. The distinguished career of Texas’ favorite son, Jim Lehrer of PBS, and the robust Spanish-language newspapers in our back yard—the eighth-largest media market in the United States—are but two examples of journalism excellence discussed in these pages.

COVER magazine also gives our students an opportunity to learn by researching journalism issues relevant to the current media market. This tangible learning outcome also contributes to the professional conversation of journalism in the Southwest. The Mayborn Institute, the first nationally accredited professional master’s program in Texas, continues to stress the core values of print journalism — fair, truthful and ethical media practices. The journalism graduate program was named the Frank W. Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism in 1999 thanks to a generous gift from the Frank W. and Sue Mayborn Foundation Advise and Consult Fund at Communities Foundation of Texas, Inc. Through this gift, the Mayborn Graduate Institute is able to offer $200,000 in scholarships every year. The Mayborn Institute is located at the University of North Texas in Denton, about 30 miles northwest of Dallas.

We invite journalists from throughout the Southwest to give us feedback on this project, story ideas and to provide valuable insight to our students who continue working on future issues.

Mitch Land, Ph.D.
Director
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Cover photo: Travis Bartoshek
Cover concept: Ida Mia Castillo, Brandie Green & Brian Stimson
The time is 4:55 p.m., and listeners are in the middle of the “Bluegrass Run,” the 10-minute wrap-up to disc jockey Dan Foster’s show on KHYI 95.3 The Range, one of the Dallas-Fort Worth area’s few remaining independent radio stations. It signals Allan Peck’s flock of listeners that he’s in the studio, ready to ride shotgun on their commute home from work during the evening rush.

Peck is the on-air personality every Monday through Thursday from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at KHYI in Plano. The 45-year veteran of the airwaves also is in the Radio Broadcast Hall of Fame, is a three-time Country Music Association “Disc Jockey of the Year” honoree and five-time winner of Billboard Magazine’s Personality of the Year Award. Moreover, Peck is one of the last of a breed of radio personalities who still spins his own mix of favorites in an industry that’s being taken over by huge media companies such as Clear Channel Communications.

Unlike radio stations that rely on a standard playlist of hits, KHYI reflects the road-less-traveled musical tastes of its DJs. Peck is a fan of a wide variety of music, from traditional country to Dixieland and classical to jazz. “I do have some problems with rap. I don’t understand it. It’s not very musical to me,” says the clean-cut, mild-mannered DJ who turns 64 this year.

Every Monday, he opens the five o’clock hour by celebrating the week’s top five Americana artists and playing a tune from each ranked album. His show’s playlist reflects his eclectic taste in music. Artists in their prime such as Alison Krauss, Lyle Lovett and Pat Green, as well as legends from yesteryear such as Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson and Loretta Lynn, can be
heard on his show. The station’s vinyl and tape collections of classic country have been transferred to the current media of compact discs, Peck says, to enhance tone quality and minimize record surface noise.

Texas music artists appreciate KHYI because “we give them exposure and publicity that they’ve been unable to get anywhere else,” Peck says. The station sheds light on the talents of local musicians in unique and creative ways. For instance, Brett Dillon and Bruce Kidder’s “Hard Country” morning show broadcasts live from Bill’s Records and Tapes every Friday at high noon. A Texas music artist meets the guys at the Dallas shop and invites listeners to stop by for autographs, ice cream and maybe even a cold beer. Other stations in the Dallas-Fort Worth area have followed 95.3’s example and have jumped on the Texas music bandwagon.

KHYI is owned and operated by Metro Broadcasting — “Mayor Jones’ company” to Rockwall residents. Ken and Glenda Jones acquired the station in 1994 and it’s been in the family ever since. In 1994 the station frequently struggled to stay on the air in bad weather with only 3,000 watts of power. Eventually, the wattage increased to 6,000 and gradually to 25,000. Currently, after a long wait, the station has reached 50,000 watts. Jones has kept the station running for the past eight years with no regrets. “We’re getting bigger and better all the time because we have the right format and the right personnel together at the right time,” he says. Jones adds that Americana Country is the fastest growing format in America, still gaining new audiences by surpassing the format growth average of seven years. “We’re still in our infancy,” Jones says.

Offers pour in weekly from groups and individuals wanting to buy the station from the mayor. Jones says independent radio stations like his are an endangered species and he’s resisting the trend of family-owned businesses dying out. Independent stations are important because they serve local communities and actually can help keep members of those communities alive. “When disasters and catastrophes happen, we automatically interrupt programming,” Jones says. Amber Alerts, severe weather warnings and emergency warnings are taken seriously at KHYI and announced immediately, he says. “During the 9/11 attacks, conglomerates like Clear Channel were only manned by engineers and couldn’t activate emergency warnings,” Jones says. “We’re successful because we’re real people serving real people.”

Peck and Jones arrived in Dallas to work at separate radio stations within six months of each other in the late ’60s. The DJ’s radio career began in 1958 while attending Central Missouri State University. He worked at the campus radio station KCMS and then moved on to KOKO, both in Warrensburg, MO. “Growing up, my father was a musician and we had music in the house all the time,” Peck says. His career path seemed predestined.

Peck first received national recognition in 1967 when he was half of the “Peck and Penny Show” at Dallas’ KBOX. This was the first man-and-woman broadcast team in the United States. “It was the first one of its kind, anywhere,” Peck says. Later the name became the “Peck and Peggy” show when longtime area broadcast personality Peggy Seares got her start in radio after Penny Reeves left in the early ’70s. Seares continued her career at other area stations such as KLUV, KVIL and KLIF. The show gave Peck a faithful audience that followed him down the dial. His career led him to other stations such as WBAP and KSCS. In 1980 he helped build KIX 106.1, which is now KISS FM.

The station takes an innovative approach to advertising and marketing. Every Sunday at 4 p.m., some of the crew heads across the street to the Plano restaurant Love and War in Texas for “Shiner Bock Sundays.” Texas music artists perform weekly on the outdoor stage. The event is broadcast live, giving area musicians on their way up a chance to have two coveted opportunities at once—a concert performance and airtime in Dallas-Fort Worth.

Texas music favorites such as Tommy Alverson, Junior Brown, Ray Wiley Hubbard and Jack Ingram show up to perform at The Range’s annual Texas Music Revolution held every spring for the past eight years. “We play Americana, which is the first man-and-woman broadcast team in the United States. “It was the first one of its kind, anywhere,” Peck says. Later the name became the “Peck and Peggy” show when longtime area broadcast personality Peggy Seares got her start in radio after Penny Reeves left in the early ’70s. Seares continued her career at other area stations such as KLUV, KVIL and KLIF. The show gave Peck a faithful audience that followed him down the dial. His career led him to other stations such as WBAP and KSCS. In 1980 he helped build KIX 106.1, which is now KISS FM.

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Clarice Tinsley’s closet of an office at KDFW Fox 4 News is crammed with memorabilia from her long career. In one photo, she’s flying in an F/A-18 fighter. In others, she’s wearing a Cowboys uniform with pads, pants and helmet or reporting in Operation Desert Storm. Pictures of Tinsley and her husband of 17 years, Stephen Giles, vice president of Defenbaugh and Associates, share space on shelves with her numerous awards that honor Tinsley as one of the area’s pioneering women anchors and one of the first African-American women to hold such a high-profile position in a major media television market.

This year Tinsley marks another milestone. She’s celebrating 25 years at the Fox TV station.

Tinsley, a native of Detroit, first came to Channel 4 in 1978 from WITI-TV in Milwaukee. She graduated from Wayne State University with a liberal arts degree in radio, television and film. Anxious to be in the journalism profession, Tinsley completed her degree in three years. “I was very serious about being a reporter,” she recalls. “I had no active social life and I didn’t pledge a sorority. But while I was on campus, I loved every minute of it.”

In college a professor and adviser allowed her to put together various documentaries and anything else she thought could be a television broadcast. While in his class she first visited a newsroom and she knew that being a broadcast journalist was what she was meant to be. “I wanted to be a NASA scientist at age 10, or a ballerina, a lawyer or a doctor,” recalls Tinsley, who is wearing a dark, short suit that shows off her Tina Turner legs. “I always loved to ask questions and learn new things.” But she points out that as a child, writing came very easy to her. Her mother felt she had a talent for it, and gave her daughter a blank notebook and told her to fill a page of it everyday. Ever since then, Tinsley found writing to be a powerful tool.

“I think God gives us talent, and it’s up to us to recognize that,” she says.

When it’s time to prepare for the 5 p.m. newscast, Tinsley goes to check her appearance in a floor-length mirror. She is a very petite woman. Viewers may not notice because Tinsley sits on a pillow in her chair during broadcasts to give her some height when working with co-anchor Baron James. And Tinsley wears
stiletto heels most of the time.

She waltzes over to the news desk and glances through the material to make sure that the script is correct. Tinsley is the first person in the newsroom. “I think it’s better to be here early than to rush in late because the producer could have made a change,” she explains. “It’s just good to know.”

Then the producer comes in, followed by James.

“Twenty seconds down,” the producer says. “Stand by.” And they’re on. During the broadcast, Heather Hays, also an anchor, comes in to do her part, and the meteorologist explains the latest weather forecast.

“And we’re done,” says the producer.

Tinsley returns to her office. Why doesn’t she have a huge space with a dressing room? She responds that she loves to be in the newsroom. “This is where it all happens,” Tinsley says.

Of all the work she’s proudest at the Dallas station, Tinsley singles out “A Call for Help,” a report that brought about change and earned her the highest award in broadcast journalism, the George Foster Peabody Award for investigative reporting. In 1994 she received a call from a man who told her she was his last hope. His stepmother had been on her deathbed and he had made a call to 911 for an ambulance. In response he got arguments and delays from the operators. The woman died and no one seemed to care. Tinsley investigated the story and eventually filed a request under the Texas Open Records Act to get the records of the audiotape released.

“It was exactly as he had told me it happened,” she recalls. She started getting calls from others who said the same thing had happened to them. Tinsley’s investigation prompted death threats against her. National networks even picked up her piece. “Based on that story, people were fired and the system got changed,” Tinsley says. “And that’s why I got into journalism.”

But her most challenging assignment was covering the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

“Everything I felt on a human level, I had to suppress way down. I had to be calm and in control,” she says. Tinsley worked 16-hour shifts and was unable to sleep at night. She couldn’t grieve until she went to Ground Zero, although she says the process took a year. In her office, she keeps a picture a little girl drew of the World Trade Center towers that collapsed. It reads: “I will miss you.”

Another time she had to juggle personal grief and her duty as a journalist was on Super Bowl Sunday eight years ago. Tinsley was covering the Cowboys in the championship game when she received a call saying that her dad was terminally ill and had six months to a year to live. Tinsley had to make a decision: either leave the Super Bowl and go be with her family or stay and continue her coverage. She put her family first and left to spend time with her dad. The next day, he died.

“That was one of the most difficult times,” Tinsley recalls. “I was in deep grief for 14 months. My light just wasn’t there.” She adds: “There’s a mystery to life and we’re not always aware of it. I really thank God I put my father first. The news station completely supported me.”

During trying and difficult times, Tinsley turns to painting as a form of therapy. She began painting two years ago; her father also was an artist. On this day at the station, she proudly shows everyone her latest piece, which she donated to the University of North Texas for its desegregation event that celebrated the first African-American students who attended the university and their contributions to the school.

Tinsley also works out and does Pilates exercises twice a week. Keeping fit is very important to her because it helps project her voice to the audience. In her spare time, she uses that voice to record books on tape for volunteer work.

As she celebrates her career milestone, Tinsley credits everything to her mother and father. She says they gave her a great sense of identity and encouraged her not to let people who had a problem with her skin color or gender become an obstacle.

When she first got into the TV business, Tinsley was fortunate. She says she did not encounter racism or sexism in the industry because others had helped pioneer the way for her. The challenge she faced was being too young. She had to fight to get the good stories, but eventually proved that she was a good reporter.

Tinsley says diversity is essential in journalism. “We need more minorities in management positions,” she says. “It shouldn’t just stop at the news desk. We need more minorities in the field.”

The veteran anchor has this advice for anyone interested in becoming a journalist: “This job is not about glamour. It’s hard work every day. Once that bell is rung, you can’t unring it. I have to do this job as much as I have to take my next breath. Live it, breathe it, love it.”

Shekeira Gillis is a senior journalism student at UNT. She graduates in August.
Over 40 years in the news business. Fourteen books. Two memoirs. Two plays. Nine presidential debates as moderator. Not only is Jim Lehrer the host of one of the most-watched news programs on television, PBS' *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, but he also continues to exemplify the model journalist. He stays above the political infighting of some other television news programs and keeps his cool even while moderating the bickering presidential contenders.

This summer Lehrer's 14th novel, *Flying Crows*, will hit shelves all across the country. It's about the history of two asylum escapees who ran from the immoral and violent treatment at a mental institution in the first half of the 20th century. Lehrer explores the lasting wounds that traumatic events can leave on men and how Americans treated the mentally ill in the 1930s.

The newsman has grilled the likes of Prince Abdullah, President Roh Moo Hyun of South Korea and Secretary of State Colin Powell, but the ex-Marine agreed to sit in the interviewee's chair for this exclusive interview with COVER. One theme that emerged: Lehrer and his news team want to give viewers what they need from around the world, not necessarily what viewers think they want, all the while keeping the eye on the big stories and not the inconsequential tripe that fills the bowls of the 24-hour news stations.

**Q.** What is a good news day for Jim Lehrer?

**A.** A good news day for me? Every day is a good news day for me. When you're in the news business you don't go about judging… "this is good news, this is bad news." I've been doing daily journalism for so long that I can't allow myself the luxury to say, "my God, this is a terrific news day." Because a terrific news day may mean tragedy somewhere. It's a term I shy away from.

**Q.** After nearly 30 years in the broadcast business (almost all at PBS), have you ever entertained any notions of going back to the newspaper biz or doing something else entirely?

**A.** I'm a writer, I write books, I'm a printed word person, always will be a printed word person and, fortunately, I'm able to keep that part of me alive with my book writing.

**Q.** How has your job changed since 1972? What are you doing now that you weren't doing then?

**A.** That's when I came to Washington. I actually went on the air in 1973. At first I was doing some other stuff. I'm doing essentially the same work I was doing when I worked at *The Dallas Morning News* in 1959 — reporting on what happened that day. The only thing that's changed is the tools — the mechanical tools, the microphones and the cameras, that sort of thing — and the size of the audience. I still see myself as a reporter trying to get it right.

**Q.** You said in an interview with the *Enquirer*: "Compared to the food fight on TV, we seem like an oasis in a screaming desert." Have you noticed any of the networks altering their approaches from the last elections, or in the last 10 or 20 years?

**A.** Well, the world has changed in the last 20 years. The onset of cable news has changed everything. In the 24-hour news cycle there is no such thing as an evening news cycle. The cycle never stops. That has changed the nature of news, it has influenced everybody in the news business even though the audiences for the cable news networks are minuscule compared to the major networks and even to us. But they do have an influence… you don't have to wait for the nightly newscast, you don't...
Late in the evening, the majority of houses in this quiet Lake Highlands neighborhood look dark and lifeless. Except for one. The Dallas Morning News photographer Louis DeLuca’s home is lit up like a torch. The incessant giggling of a child can almost be heard outside. The child cannot speak English, or any language, for that matter, but he communicates a joy that is universal and speaks louder than any voice on earth. He is playing a game of cards. Nobody but him knows the rules and he sees next page.
somehow always wins.

His name is Fu Yang and he is an orphan from the Hunan Province of China. He was brought here for craniofacial reconstruction and a chance to look normal, a chance at a new life. Nobody knows just how hard his other life in China was, as he has yet to gain the communication skills necessary to share his story. However, the depth in his eyes and the scars on his body speak volumes.

The Grace Foundation in October 2003 brought Fu to America on a medical visa. A friend of his on the foundation asked DeLuca to take some pictures of the orphan as a favor. The photographer reluctantly agreed, obeying the journalistic urges inside him formed by many years of storytelling, and added one more thing to his already overflowing plate.

After just a few short hours together, the two, who were once worlds apart, connected and formed a bond. Over the
Louis DeLuca comforts his emotionally and physically exhausted wife, Dinah, while they wait for Fu to recover from surgery. The two had been up with Fu since 5 a.m.

Dinah and Fu struggle to wake up as they wait for the nurses to take him into surgery.

Center Photo: Doctors work to repair a hole in Fu Yang's palette, which would hinder him from speaking properly once his BAHA hearing implant is put into place and he is able to hear.
ensuing months DeLuca realized that something was seriously lacking in Fu's life. What the child lacked most was love. Despite the gift of a new face and a chance to hear, Fu needed a chance to laugh. He needed to love and be loved.

DeLuca says that Fu is a gift from God and that Fu has given him and his wife, Dinah, more than they could ever return. Fu might strongly disagree someday, but until then he will simply enjoy his new family, his new life and his new chance at joy.

Fu Yang and DeLuca wind down at the end of the day. Fu was born without ear canals and is almost completely deaf. He can hear very loud sounds, like his Walkman at full volume, but can't understand words and therefore cannot speak.
The Battle for News

By Kristie C. Rodriguez & Natalie Jones
Photos by Travis Bartoshek
Design by Brian Stimson

Al Día and La Estrella provide a Spanish-language news alternative. But how long will the need for Spanish newspapers last?

This isn’t a typical newsroom, with the chaotic din of ringing telephones, chatter and controlled chaos. Instead, picture a quiet, dim setting and an organized row of cubicles filled primarily with Hispanic employees speaking in both Spanish and English.

Inside the headquarters of Al Día, one of Dallas-Fort Worth’s leading Spanish-language daily newspapers, the expected intimidation of a newsroom quickly fades. With dark brown eyes, a deep voice and authoritative presence, Gilbert Bailon, president and editor of Al Día, speaks with passion about providing news to the area’s burgeoning Hispanic community. “We are writing for Latinos as Latinos,” Bailon says. “It really puts a perspective on the stories.”

The buying power and demand for news and information exploding from the Hispanic community — now the fastest growing minority group in the United States — has prodded major newspapers to launch their own Spanish-language publications. The Dallas Morning News started Al Día last September and the Fort Worth Star-Telegram created El Diario La Estrella in 1994. “Yes, newspapers are trying to respond,” Bailon says. “We’re trying to give people information they need, but also make it entertaining.”
Al Día launched with a circulation of 40,000. Bailon admits the paper took almost two years to develop. “The most difficult part was finding journalists who understood U.S.-style journalism,” he recalls. Through a mixture of job postings and recruiters, Bailon finally found his “dream team” of employees, all of whom speak both English and Spanish. With a staff of 55, Al Día is an eclectic mix of journalists, many from Mexico, Honduras, Spain, Argentina and Puerto Rico.

La Estrella first hit newsstands in 1994 as a weekly paper. Distributed throughout the North Texas region at no cost, La Estrella recently increased its publication from two to five days a week, doubled its staff and opened an office in Dallas. “We aim to serve a distinct but rapidly-growing community,” says Javier Aldape, La Estrella’s publisher. “The competitive landscape has always been robust in DFW and I expect that trend to continue. Our focus is on the majority of Hispanics in DFW — those who prefer to communicate and get news and information in Spanish.”

With more than 1.3 million Hispanics, the Dallas-Fort Worth area currently ranks seventh in the nation and second in Texas, behind Houston, as one of the top Hispanic markets. According to the 2002 U.S. Hispanic Market Report, 82 percent of Hispanics in the DFW market prefer to communicate in Spanish and 94 percent report a high incidence of using Spanish-language media.

The similarities between La Estrella and Al Día continue to blossom as both publications strive to meet the needs and expectations of the Hispanic community. Both papers emphasize local, national and international issues that are important to Hispanics such as health, family, education, immigration, employment, religion, sports and entertainment.

Bailon says the DFW Hispanic community has responded favorably since Al Día hit newsstands. “Most of our readers are thankful to finally have something that speaks to and pays attention to the Hispanic community in a respectful way,” he explains.

Likewise, La Estrella’s progress within the last 10 years, Aldape says, has been successful in giving Hispanics the recognition they deserve. “Being able to serve and strengthen a community that is hard-working, vibrant and family-centered makes my job extremely rewarding,” Aldape says. “The stories of our wonderful culture have been kept silent for far too long.”

John Gutierrez-Mier, a staff writer for the Star-Telegram, says he and other Hispanic journalists who report for English papers find it challenging to “try to convince editors that what’s important for the Hispanic community is important for the entire community. We need to see ourselves in these pages.” Adds Daniel Vargas, a freelance writer for the Houston Chronicle: “Information is power. And if you’re not getting it from the English media, you need to get it from somewhere else.”

With the Hispanic population soaring, the number of the Spanish-language media outlets also is rising. According to a study by The State of the News Media 2004, U.S. Spanish-language daily newspaper circulation jumped from 135,000 in 1970 to 1.7 million in 2002, while the number of Spanish-language daily newspapers in the United States grew from eight to 35 in 2002. Hispanics, the fastest growing ethnic group in Texas, also have a huge collective buying power: an estimated $14.2 billion annually, according to the 2002 U.S. Hispanic Market Report.

In terms of content, both La Estrella and Al Día share resources with their parent papers as well as with national Spanish-language newspapers and wire services. “We find that the number of stories we translate from English-language newspapers is relatively small,” Aldape says. “Instead, we use information from other papers like El Nuevo Herald in South Florida, as well as Spanish-language wire services such as Agencia Reforma.”

The launch of Al Día has led to a competitive increase in
advertising and readership, yet Aldape isn’t worried about the paper’s future. “La Estrella has been growing and changing steadily since its launch,” he says.

Both Al Día and La Estrella serve a diverse, growing community that prefers to read news and information in Spanish. Bailon contends Al Día focuses primarily on local news that readers can’t get elsewhere. Still, he is quick to point out that not everyone in DFW is supportive of this new Spanish-language media explosion. “There is a big misconception that we’re trying to create a separate, Spanish-dominated society,” Bailon says. “Those people who disagree with what we’re doing are scared of something they don’t know and don’t understand.”

Nationwide, many other states are seeing competition increase for readership and advertising among local Spanish-language dailies. In Los Angeles, for example, the Tribune Co.’s third Spanish-language daily to carry the name Hoy launched this March alongside Southern California’s 77-year-old daily La Opinión. According to the Associated Press, La Opinión and Tribune ended a dual venture in January, and La Opinión merged with New York’s 90-year-old daily El Diario/La Prensa. Together they have established Impremedia LLC, the first national chain of Spanish-language newsprint. “It’s the only growth area for newspapers in America right now,” says Juan Gonzalez, president of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and columnist for the New York Daily News.

The rush to serve the Hispanic market, though, should not undercut journalistic quality, Gonzalez adds. “Our principle goal has to be to maintain the highest standards of journalism and not go along with weak standards or an orientation that sees the community more as a market to be exploited rather than as a community to be served,” he says.

Spanish-language newspapers don’t only target U.S. Hispanics, though. “The mission of El Sol de Texas is to be the voice of immigrants in Texas,” says Rogelio Santillan, publisher of Texas’ oldest Spanish-language newspaper. Based in Carrollton, El Sol de Texas was founded by immigrants in 1966. Santillan has worked as a reporter, editor and publisher of the independent newspaper for more than 15 years. He adds that most of its readers would be limited or unable to comprehend news and information on U.S. immigration and policy provided through English-language media. “We provide our readers with information that is necessary for them to take action on important issues,” he says about the weekly. Most of El Sol’s journalists are, in fact, immigrants themselves.

The sudden demand for Spanish-language newsprint has caused a tremendous need for bilingual reporters. Many of the newer papers have had to recruit writers from outside the United States. Gonzalez says that hiring reporters

See page 25
The scenes should be almost famous by now: A silver tour bus streaks down the highway, reflecting green fields and countryside off its side as it barrels toward the next gig. Then a hot chick saunters down the bus aisle, stopping at your seat (yes, you, the ugly guy with the thick glasses and the notepad). The Jack Daniels burns your throat as you try to hide that you’re not really used to the straight stuff, and of course, the drugs...all the images that paint the picture of a rock journalist’s typical day. The writer along for the ride, the person that stands as both a fan and a critic living the dream and reaping the benefits...does it get any better?

Uh, wait a minute...

“That’s fantasy,” says David Fricke, senior editor of Rolling Stone magazine. “That’s the stuff you see in movies.”

Myths created by Hollywood and our own imaginations have fooled us into thinking that hanging out with rock stars isn’t really hard work. But the professionals say it is. These are the people whose love of both music and writing has cast them into the competitive—some say oversaturated—music journalism market, with tight deadlines and an atypical professional life of instability and change.

Both newspaper and magazine writers say that combining the art forms of music and writing to create a review, promote an act or interview a star are harder than they seem.”Writing is hard... f--ing hard!” Fricke says. “A lot of people think it’s sitting down and writing an opinion. It’s a lot more.”

Music journalists generally say their job, contrary to popular belief, doesn’t consist of hanging out with bands and drooling star-struck like a groupie. Instead, they present themselves to artists in a professional manner to obtain a story. Journalism is writing, not partying, no matter what the beat is. Gabrielle Burns, editor of the Austin-based webzine Jupiter Index, says the tools needed by music journalists are not all that different from those of a writer on any other beat. “Journalism in general is about staying on facts, double-checking details,” she says.

Burns adds that these tools should be even more refined in a rock critic, as the music world is fast-paced and ever changing. A rock music writer must provide a constant stream of information from bands to fans. “It looks great when you’re talking to any given musician, but there’s a lot behind it,” she explains. “Their influence, you have to tie that in with what the reader wants to know about.”

The job is demanding, defying the myth that a rock critic or writer’s job is an average 40-hour-a-week gig. Not true. “It’s long, very long,” says Malcolm Mayhew, music critic for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, of his work day. “And it gobbles up your weekends, too.” He works from about 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. If an unexpected entertainment story pops up, he has to stop and attend to it, just like a general beat journalist. Like Mayhew, most rock music writers don’t spend their entire day working on music stories. He writes general features, too.

Music and writing share something in common: salaries can be low. “One downside is that it pays very little,” says Linda Holler, editor of Dallas-based HB Magazine, a small monthly that covers national and local heavy metal and hard rock artists in the Dallas area. “Most publications don’t pay that well. It’s not anything a lot of people make a lot of money doing. I think that’s a misconception.”

So how tapped out is the market? Surprisingly, not too much. Many veteran rock critics argue that because the music scene is so wide open, with new sounds and genres created constantly and some old sounds refusing to die, the ability to carve out a niche in the industry and make a living is a possibility. “There’s so much music out there and so many performers; you can never cover everything. There’s just too much damn music!” says Thor Christensen, music critic for The Dallas Morning News.
MARGARET MYRICK AND JULIAN AGUILAR ARE STUDENTS AT THE MAYBORN GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM. SHE GRADUATES IN MAY, HE GRADUATES IN AUGUST.
Kristi Scales stepped into the Dallas Cowboy’s locker room on her first day of the job in the 1990s. She was one of just two women sports journalists in the locker room and was there to take advantage of a one-hour window to interview players.

As the hour wound down and the Cowboys headed out for practice, Scales looked across the locker room just in time to see 360-pound offensive lineman Nate Newton “in all his glory,” as she put it. “I guess if that doesn’t scare you off, then nothing will,” Scales says wryly, recalling the scene.

It didn’t scare off Scales. She has worked at KLUV as the Dallas Cowboys’ sideline reporter ever since the locker room encounter. Back then she thought there would never be more than two or three women in the media following and covering the Cowboys. But now about 10 women at a time are in the locker rooms or on team charter flights.

In a time when women are beginning to challenge men in pro golf and nearly everywhere in professional sports, women also are beginning to get a grip everywhere in professional sports, especially, Scales says. Roberts got her first TV job in 1984 and currently works as an anchor for ABC’s Good Morning America. She has also hosted ESPN’s SportsCenter and NFL PrimeTime. In 1996 the first Robin Roberts Sports Journalism Scholarship was awarded at the NCAA Women’s Final Four.

Brennan currently is a sports columnist for USA Today, but established quite a few firsts in her career. She was the first female to cover the Washington Redskins and the first female sports writer at the Miami Herald. She was also the first-ever president of the Association for Women in Sports Media and has covered every Olympics since 1984. "She is one of the women I really respect," Floyd says. "She had to fight a lot of battles to get where she is." Floyd herself is not only a writer, but is also a regular guest on ESPN Radio’s Galloway & Company show and appears frequently on NBC Channel 5’s sportscast on Sunday nights with Newy Scruggs.

It’s not as rough on women sports journalists as it used to be, Scales and Floyd agree. “Guys that have made it this far in sports have seen women reporters at the high school and college level so it’s not really a big deal to them,” Floyd says. “But in college my byline just said J.N. Floyd” so I surprised some people because they just assumed I was a man.”

Scales adds that as long as women sports journalists asks intelligent questions, it can be an advantage to be female. “Being one of the few helps because you stand out in a crowd,” Scales says. “The players know who you are and when there are so many people trying to get a minute of their time, any advantage you can get helps.”

Women sports journalists tend to be held to a higher standard because they aren’t expected to know as much about
“Obituary Writer Six Feet Under.”
This isn’t the latest episode of the popular HBO series, but rather the headline Larken Bradley hopes will appear on her obituary. Not that Bradley, age 51, is depressed or ill. She’s actually an energetic and creative woman who happens to write obituaries for a living.

In the not-too-distant past, obituaries were approached with a sense of duty by those who published them and a sense of dread by those who wrote them. But with an aging baby boomer population, a growing appreciation of historical preservation and a need for good writing, those times are changing.

Today the obituary has been elevated to an art form. Reporters and professional writers regularly are commissioned to write obituaries for high-profile individuals such as political figures and celebrities. National and international organizations of obituarists, as the writers like to call themselves, have been formed, Web sites developed and annual conferences on the subject are being held. It’s enough to make newspaper editors and cub reporters of yesteryear roll over in their graves.

Obituary writers have the daunting task of bringing the deceased
back to life through their words, a job Bradley took to heart after making a mid-life career change. She worked as a social worker before making the switch to freelance writing. The day-to-day grind of churning out news stories was not for her, but she found obit writing a perfect fit.

She made the dramatic switch in professions by taking a non-paid internship. Eventually it led to a position as a full-time obituary writer for the *Point Reyes Light* in Northern California where Bradley produces an average of two obituaries a week. In addition to her work for the *Light*, Bradley writes obituaries by request via her recently launched Web site www.obituarywriters.com and is an active member of the International Association of Obituaries.

According to Bradley, the approach to obituary writing is very straightforward. She first gets biographical information on a person's life, such as place and date of birth, marital history, professional background and more. Then Bradley conducts interviews with three to five relatives, friends or co-workers. These interviews help to capture the personality of the deceased. (Bradley's favorites: cranky and crotchety individuals, people who don’t care what others think and those who have done unusual things in their lives). After all the information is collected, it’s time to write.

Being a good listener, questioning what people say as truth and being able to “hang in there with the pain” all help in the field of obituary writing. Often, people take on saint-like status after they die, and being able to question whether they ever had a bad day or a temper really helps to capture their lives more accurately and interestingly. Expecting loved ones to grieve also comes with the territory, so it’s important for a writer to establish rapport with sources.

Bradley loves her job and has fun doing it — most of the time. But she also believes the job takes an emotional toll on writers. Bradley describes this phenomenon as something in the psyche, a sort of secondary trauma where the events of death are not directly happening to obituary writers but are still internalized by them. She recalls a time at a conference when a writer told a story about writing obits and fell apart emotionally before the crowd. Bradley feels this issue needs to be addressed — perhaps even at the 6th Great Obituary Writers’ Conference to be held in June in Las Vegas, N.M. Its host is Carolyn Gilbert, the association's founder and editor of www.obitpage.com, a Web site dedicated to all things obit — including literature, news and events.

Gilbert, who lives in Dallas, is a charismatic woman with a *joie de vivre* that attracts people like cat hair to black velvet. She is a person who looks death in the face every day and literally lives to write about it. Gilbert’s efforts, along with those of her organization, have drawn national and international publicity. The increased respect and demand for good obituary
writing has promoted the status of the craft to a highly specialized field. “You’re writing the ultimate short story,” Gilbert, also known as “The Obit Lady,” says. “You’re not writing about the death. You’re writing about the life of a person.”

Gilbert explains that for many people, the obituary is the only time a person’s name will ever be in the newspaper. That’s why seasoned, accurate reporting is so critical in preserving what will inevitably serve as a historical record of a person’s life — and in many cases, it will be the only record.

“You must love people” as an obituarist, Gilbert explains. She says that obituary writing demands all the skills of good news reporting, such as interviewing, fact checking, accuracy, sensitivity and research. “And of course,” she adds with a mischievous grin, “meeting deadlines.”

A good sense of humor also is an essential attribute of any successful obituarist, according to Gilbert. “You can’t be surrounded by death and let it get to your psyche,” she says.

Joe Simnacher, who has written obituaries for The Dallas Morning News for 11 years, agrees with Gilbert that a sense of humor is a must for a good obituary writer, along with the skills used in covering a news story. Investigative research, attention to detail and accuracy are paramount, according to Simnacher. But another interesting quality he adds to the list is patience. “One of the biggest handicaps in writing an obituary is for the people you interview to get past the eulogies,” Simnacher says. “You have to talk to people for awhile to get to the real person.”

His favorite part of the job is when that patience finally pays off and the “real stories” emerge. “There is an amazing amount of people with interesting stories that have never been reported,” he says. “There are incredible stories.”

Simnacher recalls writing an obituary about five years ago when Kay Tiller, a multi-talented Dallas public relations executive with a sunny disposition and a slew of good friends, died. Tiller was acquainted with many members of the local media, so when Simnacher landed the obit beat at the newspaper she suggested they sit down and talk about her obituary sometime. But Tiller died before that meeting could take place.

While conducting background research on this socially active woman, who was passionate about everything from photography to landscape architecture, Simnacher learned that her Irish-immigrant father had died before she was born and her mother died while giving birth to her. She was adopted at the age of four months but was sent away to boarding school when she was 12 and her adoptive mother became critically ill. Despite the odds, Tiller made her way through school and became engaged to a soldier during WWII — her junior year at the University of Texas. Her fiancé was killed in the war. More than 50 years later, Tiller slumped dead in her chair after singing two songs at an Irish-American Society gathering.

Tiller, who never married, was still wearing the engagement ring her fiancé had given her when she died. “I was shocked to see what hard times she had faced in her life,” Simnacher says. “Yet she was always so happy.”

Simnacher says it’s particularly exciting to discover an achievement or event in someone’s life about which people never knew, while it’s equally satisfying to capture the essence of the individual’s personality. “If people say, ‘I didn’t know that about him or, ‘Yes! That was her!’ then you’ve hit the ball out of the park.”

But unfortunately, sometimes the family of the deceased is the biggest obstacle in writing a quality obituary. When an individual has been married more than once, for example, tremendous feuds can develop between former spouses regarding how the obituary should be written, who should be mentioned — or not, and in what order. The same confusion holds true for individuals who have children from multiple marriages. There are also religious and ethical concerns to consider, particularly in regard to cause of death.

“When someone dies of AIDS, sometimes one segment of the family wants to present it in another way, such as pneumonia,” Simnacher says. “It’s incredible how petty and rough it can get.”

Simnacher adds the family dynamic plays a tremendous role in putting together a good obituary. Ironically, over the years he has discovered that many times the people closest to the deceased know the least about him or her. “It’s kind of sad when you ask someone, ‘What made your dad want to be an engineer, or a doctor, etc.? ’ and they say, ‘You know, I really don’t know.’”

That’s why Simnacher insists it’s so important for people to make a record of their life, where they went to high school, their parent’s names and other biographical data before they die. It speaks to the importance of accuracy and the permanence of the obituary as a historical record. “When you get a bio form that someone has filled out themselves — there’s no better feeling,” Simnacher says.

Dr. Richard Wells, professor of journalism at the University of North Texas’ Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism and co-developer of the country’s first obituary archive, agrees. “We can’t lose sight of the fact that a newspaper obit is the only long-term history of these individuals,” he says. “An obituary may be the most important story that a journalist will ever write — at least to the family and friends of that person.”

With the exception of government officials and celebrities, newspaper is the primary medium for this historical record of

“You’re not writing about the death. You’re writing about the life of a person.”

— Carolyn Gilbert

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2004 cover 23
Political columnist and reporter Gromer Jeffers Jr. remembers waiting four years ago in The Dallas Morning News newsroom for the presidential election results to trickle in from Florida. He, like the rest of The News’ political reporting team, was hoping to call it a night with a drink at a nearby bar to celebrate the end of that chapter of campaign history. Many political reporters were expecting a close race between then-candidates George W. Bush and Al Gore, but didn’t expect anything like what happened that night.
candidates for president, and so that’s why we focus on politics here.” He adds: “Most people claim it’s because there’s a tradition of rough-and-tumble politics here so if you can survive that in Texas, you can survive it on a national level. Texas is a kind of a microcosm of the nation. It’s urban rule, it’s a huge economy, and it’s growing so politicians here often have a grasp of national issues and how to handle that.”

The News plans to devote a comparable amount of resources in 2004 as it did in 2000 to the campaign and to covering Bush, Edgar says. It will combine the efforts of many: two full-time Dallas-based reporters, columnists and specialty beat and feature reporters across many departments — the metro desk, the Texas and the Southwest section, as well as from Washington and other regional bureaus. “Like the coverage in 2000, there will be intense coverage because George Bush is from Texas and people want to read about the Texan,” Edgar says. “Bush used to live in Dallas. He has associates in this state from when he ran for governor and president, and Texas is the place he’s raised more money than any other state. He is the home state candidate.”

However, Edgar adds that the challenge is to write with a local angle when covering the political landscape and find new ways to do the same kind of stories. “You can’t confine yourself to the borders of Texas,” he explains. “When you do stories about how people think about George Bush, you don’t do it out of Texas, you do it out of other places.”

Gravois said the Star-Telegram will try to shine a Texas spotlight on Bush. “The fact that he is a Texan will lead to some extra and different coverage, such as occasional features at Crawford (home of Bush’s ranch),” he says. “His legislative history as governor also generates extra angles for us.” But Gravois adds that like most newspapers, his has “scaled back greatly on how much first-hand, follow-the-candidate-on-the-trail type of coverage” it will do. “We leave that to the wires,” he says. “Our focus is on issues, primarily topics of interest to our North Texas readers, such as defense and immigration. We strive to tell the story behind the story on key issues.”

Dave Montgomery, Washington bureau chief of the Star-Telegram, says he’s looking for ways to provide different coverage and “not just parrot what everyone else is saying.” The focus right now is on enterprise stories, which he described as “Sunday-type stories when readers are kind of curled up with a Krispy Kreme donut and some coffee in the morning and they can spend more time reading.” That means “doing stories that go beyond the traditional ones and that provide a perspective that you don’t always get from reading the newspaper on a daily basis. Their purpose is to take the long view and put things in perspective.” He adds: “We always try to weave in a Texas angle. If there’s a legitimate local angle, we include that and accent it.”

That a Texan is the leader of the free world makes the 2004 presidential race an important enough story to cover, Ward of WFAA said. But the fact that this area is considered “Bush country” also matters. “A lot of people here are conservative and supportive of Bush,” she said. “But in a state that’s heavily Republican, it’s important to know there are Democrats out there. Our
We want to draw an audience on what we think is important rather than the other way around. OK, the audience thinks they are more interested in sex than they are on Iraq, so we are going to give them sex? We think Iraq is more important, we’re going to give them Iraq and do our best to bring them to that rather than the other way around.

Q. Your new book is about an old escaped asylum patient. Where did the source material come from?

A. It’s hard to walk the cat back, as they say in the CIA. This is a story told from my interest in what witnessing a traumatic event can do to the individual, and I ended up making up these two characters in a mental institute in Missouri in the 1930s and each one had witnessed a massacre.

Q. Has the 24-hour newscast affected PBS?

A. No. It probably affects us in some ways, but our mission is still the same, which is to do one-hour, every 24 hours, and to bring together the big news events and take two to three stories and go at it with a little more depth.

Q. What is it about PBS’s news coverage that really makes it stand out from the rest?

A. Well, I have to leave that to others to say. From my point of view, we are driven by our own news judgments … obviously we want people to watch it or there is no point in doing it, as MacNeil (his former co-anchor, Robert MacNeil) used to say. We could get on the phone every morning and talk about the news (amongst ourselves) and hang up and go about our business. We want people to watch what we are doing and listen to what we are doing and pay attention to what we are doing. Do we want them to pay attention to what we think are the important stories, not based on some kind of survey or some artificial equation designed primarily to draw an audience? or said they did. Out of that, the bond grew between the two of them and their problems and their leaving the asylum together and ending up in Union Station in Kansas City, Mo. The story just grew from there.

Q. Many of your books deal with the past catching up with the present. Do you ever find your past messing with your future?

A. I think all of us — I’m no different from anybody else — are affected by what happened before we got here and we are all the end result of all kinds of influences. Some of them very direct — in terms of friends, family, the environment and so forth. We’re also tied securely and forever to other people who came before us, and I’m just fascinated by the connections between what happens today and what happened before. I think that’s why I’ve written so many novels about it. It just really fascinates me.

Q. Why novels, why not nonfiction?

A. Impossible not to. Not in a very overt way. I don’t say, “My God, now I’m going to create a character who is patterned after me.” Let’s face it, if you write about love and other human emotions, the only way you can write about them in any kind of real way is to experience some of these things. Even though it’s not about a character, maybe somebody that is totally different from me on the surface, some of the basic human emotions have to come out of my own experiences. It’s inescapable.

Q. How much longer can we expect to see Jim Lehrer on the NewsHour ticket?

A. I still enjoy the job. I get a real kick out of it. I’m going to continue to do it until one of two things happens — when I just no longer get a kick out of it or when I start drooling on the air. I have control of the first one, I don’t have control of the second. So, we’ll see. Right now, I’m still moving along and feeling very good about it. One day, maybe one of these two things will happen, and I’ll go away. But right now I have no plans to.
individuals both public and private. That's what prompted Gilbert, a UNT alum, and Wells to begin building an archive of quality, well-written obituaries of both well-known and ordinary people. It will be housed on the UNT campus.

The archive is in the early stages of development, but the long-term goal is for it to serve as a reference source for students and researchers to have an opportunity to see the best, according to Wells. In addition to the impressive collection of The New York Times' obituaries, obituaries from major newspapers across the country and from around the world will be in the archive. Plans call for opening the repository this year. When the appropriate funding is secured, Wells said he hopes to have the obituaries available online some day.

Obituarists say they get some interesting reactions from people when they tell them what they do for a living: “What? There is such a profession?” Or, “We sure could’ve used some help on grandmother’s obit.” Gilbert has created a useful do-it-yourself tool called the Obit Kit. The kit is essentially a form for individuals to fill out prior to death so the details of their lives are documented for loved ones. Contact Gilbert through her Web site, www.obitpage.com, to request a kit. The cost is $15, plus shipping and handling.

Although the prospect of chronicling your own life for obituary purposes may not sound rosy, it can bring great comfort to loved ones in a time of grief — and ensure accuracy in the account of your life. And according to most obituarists, that's nothing to feel sad about. Gilbert speaks for many of her colleagues when she stresses the importance of maintaining the proper perspective and respect for the craft. “The obituary is not the notice of a death — it is the story of a life,” she contends. “Think of the obituary as a personal time capsule and imagine your descendants opening it up in 50 years. Will your obituary tell them who you really were?”

Ruth Ann Hensley and Angela Orozco are students at Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism. Hensley graduates in May and Orozco graduates in August.

Kelli Pierce is a student at the Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism. She graduates in August.

Spanish

primarily from outside the country could be detrimental to the U.S. Hispanic community. He adds that journalism schools should acknowledge the need and begin to educate their journalism students to write and communicate effectively in Spanish. “They’ve got to begin adjusting their training programs and begin producing Spanish-language degree programs,” says the NAHJ president. “Otherwise, you’re going to keep importing Latin American journalists to work in the U.S. It’s great they know how to write in Spanish, but they don’t necessarily know the community they’re reporting on.”

One thing is sure: Without Hispanic media and journalists, this expanding community will continue to struggle to find a voice. Even as Spanish-speakers learn English and become more acclimated to the United States, editors say that Spanish-language newspapers will keep providing a service.

Bailon says he’s not concerned about losing readership to future educated Hispanics who learn English in grade school. “College-educated Hispanics may not be Al Día’s target audience,” he says, “but those who look for specific stories about Hispanic culture and happenings will always have an interest in what we publish.”

Aldape agrees. “I’m a firm believer that the old model of having immigrant communities lose their native language skills after three generations is dead,” he says. “For a news source with credible, relevant information focused on the Latino community, there will always be an audience.”

Kristie C. Rodriguez is a senior journalism student at UNT and is currently an intern for La Crónica Latina. She graduates in May.

Natalie Jones is a student at the Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism and graduates in May. She currently is employed as a bilingual aide with the Denton ISD.
Big-Screen Portrayals of Reporters Draw Mostly Low Marks for Accuracy

These are just a few titles from the long list of movies that depict the field of journalism. Some may make you laugh, some might make you cry and some might make you want to throw something at the big screen because the director got it all wrong.

But do any films really portray the field of journalism accurately, right down to putting the tape in the actor’s tape recorder? Or do directors mislead moviegoers when painting the life of a journalist across the wide screen?

Not every movie tells an accurate story down to the smallest detail. Many issues can be misinterpreted and seem farfetched when it comes to film and television. As WFAA Channel 8 film critic Gary Cogill says, movies are not meant to be documentaries (unless they are documentaries, of course). Directors are there to make a movie, not tell the truth. “Films misuse every major issue—faith, teachers, lawyers. Every group is misinterpreted,” Cogill says.

So it’s not surprising that some films score hits and others misses when it comes to representing journalists. At least the majority of these films are entertaining and allow you to laugh at the image directors have created. For instance, the 1994 film The Paper, featuring Michael Keaton, Robert Duvall and Randy Quaid, takes a behind-the-scenes look at a New York tabloid and the lives of its staff.

Throughout the film, Keaton’s character visits the Coke machine every chance he gets to load up on caffeine to get him through the day. Halfway through the movie his secretary gives him a cup full of change and tells him he can stop asking everyone for money. Quaid’s amusing character, a columnist, carries a gun in pants because of the threats he receives due to his column. He sleeps in the editor’s office to hide from those wanting to hunt him down and is eventually attacked at a bar by a man he wrote about. We all know journalism can be a risky job at times, but do columnists really have to hide away in the office and carry a gun these days?

The film does tell a colorful story about what a newsroom can be like on a day when reporters are out competing to get the latest information on a breaking story. But what about the big red switch in the press room at the end of the movie? Internet columnist Paul Schindler says on his Web site dedicated to journalism movies that this little detail is “silly, overdone, stupid and unrealistic.”

Some journalists find a few films to be just completely wrong. When asked about
how he felt about the movie *Up Close and Personal*, Cogill laughs. "It's the single worst example of professional television journalism I have ever seen on film," he says. "It's all distorted in order to make a romance first and a credible film about TV journalists last."

In the film, the ambitious, aspiring anchorwoman Tally Atwater, played by Michelle Pfeiffer, gets hired for a desk job. After pitching a few ideas with a pushy attitude, she lands a spot as a weather woman. (Remember, this character has no broadcast experience.) Soon she's given the chance to be an on-camera reporter and moves right up the chain. The movie gives the impression that breaking into a TV reporter job is easy even with little or no experience. "The original screenplay was rewritten and changed so many times the original author ended up angry and distanced himself from the film," Cogill says. "I think he even wrote a scathing book about all the problems in that film."

And then there are the movies that make journalists out to be courageous, exposing the world's scandals. Who can forget the movie *All the President's Men* with Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein uncovering the Watergate scandal? "The journalists became a heroic figure in movies with *All the President's Men,*" says *The Dallas Morning News* film critic Chris Vognar. The 1976 film presented journalists as crusaders for truth, increasing the field's popularity and flooding journalism schools with students aspiring to be investigative reporters. The movie had great credibility because it accurately reflected the behind-the-scenes work of real journalists. Not surprisingly, Woodward and Bernstein wrote the script.

Other films portray journalists in many different ways, depending on when the films were made and how the times reflect public attitudes about the press, Vognar says. "In the '30s and '40s many American movies, including *His Girl Friday* and *Meet John Doe* portrayed journalists as cynical, fast-talking, and ethically questionable, but often kindhearted,“ he adds. "It's also worth noting that many of the early Hollywood screenwriters came from the world of journalism."

The most recent film about journalism is *Shattered Glass*. The main character, former New Republic reporter Stephen Glass, was busted for making up all or parts of many stories. "He is a villain and the film arrived in the wake of the Jayson Blair scandal at *The New York Times,*" Vognar observes. But the film also includes a hero, Glass' former editor, Charles Lane, who fires Glass. He emerges as “a symbol of journalistic integrity.”

*Shattered Glass* reveals some journalists' lack of ethics, even though ethics is a subject usually taught in journalism programs. The moral of the story is that faking notes and interviews, making up facts and even the ideas on which an article is based catch up with the liar in the end and leave an unethical journalist with no job and no credibility. "It's one of the best films on the lack of ethics in journalism," Cogill says. He adds that the movie was a good example of a smarter effort to do a film about journalists and what can go wrong in the profession.

The bottom line, though, is that movies exist for entertainment. As Cogill says, directors are out to make a movie and don't particularly care about telling the truth or painting a real picture. So, some films portray journalists in a heroic light such as *The Insider*, a film about a 60 Minutes producer who defends his source and defies the corporate office when it attempts to take the decision of what is newsworthy into its own hands. Others depict a journalist out to get the story at all costs. In reality, though, those are extreme portrayals. So the next time you're sitting in a movie theater munching on popcorn and watching the latest movie about journalism, separate the glitz from the everyday grind of a real reporter's life. Remember, it's all Hollywood.

*Lindsay Brandt is a senior journalism student at UNT. She graduates in August.*
Texas A&M’s steps to close its J-school may be an extreme case, but other colleges face similarly challenging times.

By Molly McCullough
Design by Brandie Green and Mandy Fry

The scene on the second floor of Texas A&M University’s Reed-McDonald Building will be quite different a year from now. No longer will you see aspiring journalists going to class, waiting to see an adviser or chatting with professors. All of that will be gone, along with Texas A&M’s Journalism Department.

Many stories are circulating about why Texas A&M’s Journalism Department has closed its doors. One thing is certain — Texas’ second largest university has decided a journalism degree is no longer important. The decision reverberates all the way to North Texas where concerned journalists wonder whether the situation at A&M could happen again and whether the state’s journalism schools are, indeed, in crisis.

Loren Steffy, Dallas Press Club president, Bloomberg Dallas bureau chief and Texas A&M journalism graduate, arranged a Dallas Press Club panel to discuss that very question in February. Steffy found out his alma mater’s journalism program was being eliminated through a meeting with Charles Johnson, dean of the College of Liberal Arts, and other journalism alumni. “The dean basically told us that the university had plans to eliminate the journalism program, which at the time was the smallest budget in the entire college,” Steffy told journalists and students attending the lunch meeting. “But what we found out in the ensuing few months was that journalism had made itself an easy target.”

The Texas A&M Journalism Department had painted a bull’s eye on itself by not being a nationally recognized program and not fitting in with the whole research approach that the College of Liberal Arts was following, according to Steffy. It’s not all that common for a college to have a nationally recognized journalism program. Only about one-quarter of all journalism schools currently are nationally recognized. This means that an accrediting council made up of 36 media practitioners, deans and professors examines the journalism and mass communication departments of over 100 universities and colleges within the United States.

“What the accrediting council tries to ensure is that the level of instruction for programs, the equipment, the budget, the student body, the curriculum, all are giving journalism students and future journalists and mass communicators a well-balanced education,” says Steve Geimann, Bloomberg’s team leader of transportation news and a member of the accrediting council who spoke at the Press Club panel. “Not just journalism skills or journalism theory, but a well-rounded, liberal arts, broad knowledge of what is going on in the industry, what’s going on in the community.”

Many schools are not accredited because they focus more on the theoretical side of journalism and less on the practical side. “I think the decision on seeking accreditation is up to every unit,” Geimann says. “Being accredited means having a well-rounded, well-funded program that is accepted by the academy and the industry.”

Texas A&M may be the most extreme case, but it isn’t the only university that has had problems with its journalism department. Recently, Texas Woman’s University’s Mass Communication Department in Denton was a casualty, too. According to the Denton Record-Chronicle, TWU had to shut down its Mass Communication Department because of lack of money as well as decreasing enrollment. It also faced the decision of spending the money to fix the department’s problems or to drop it. TWU previously had decided not to renew its accreditation. Unfortunately, TWU decided to drop the program. It figured that interested students could enroll in neighbor University of North Texas’ Journalism Department instead.
Despite the increase in students’ interest in the field, journalism programs are still having their problems. “Is there a crisis? The news guy side of me says, ‘yeah, there’s a crisis’; the PR guy says, ‘well, no, there’s a challenge here,’” Wells joked at the Dallas Press Club panel discussion.

It’s an uphill battle for those universities that accept the challenge. Tony Pederson, chairman of Southern Methodist University’s journalism school, says SMU will begin the long process to prepare for accreditation in the future. Tommy Thomason, chairman of Texas Christian University’s Journalism Department, says he believes it’s important to keep TCU’s administration aware of what is going on in the department. “We’ve got to be explaining what we’re doing and justifying what we’re doing,” Thomason says. “When we don’t do that, or don’t do it effectively enough, or don’t raise enough money to justify what we’re doing, then we end up back to the A&M situation.”

Another major problem for universities is finding money during difficult budget-cutting times to fund their journalism programs, Thomason says. “And they (the administration) don’t understand why we keep needing new computers and new software and opportunities for our pros to go to these professional meetings, where they may not be presenting a paper, but they need to go for various reasons. So I find that constantly I’m doing education internally trying to explain what we do and why we need that.”

Those universities that choose not to accept this challenge have to find a solution for the hundreds of students who are left in a closing department. At TWU, the remaining journalism students will be able to take all the mass communication courses they need during the next four semesters to finish up their degrees. After that, TWU only will offer courses depending on what classes the students need to finish their program, according to the Denton Record-Chronicle article.

It wasn’t so easy for Texas A&M to find a solution for closing the department. There was a massive outcry from media outlets around the state. Panels of professionals were called in to make presentations to the dean, hoping he would change his mind. But all was in vain. The department was doomed. “In short, he (Dean Johnson) thought it would go away without a lot of noise. I think we proved him wrong on that account,” Steffy says.

This year, on August 31st, the presses will stop for the journalism department at Texas A&M. However, in the fall of 2004, students who have an interest in the newspaper side of journalism will be able to follow a course of study in the field, with many hands-on experiences from professionals in the area. The culmination of this study will be some sort of certificate of journalism, says Doug Starr, Texas A&M journalism professor. This certificate will certainly not take the place of a degree, so students seeking a certificate will be forced to major in another area of study. Those students who declared journalism as their major no later than fall of 2003 will be allowed to finish their degrees.

Does the story end here for Texas A&M’s Journalism Department? Probably not. But Steffy, who also is the current president of A&M’s Former Journalism Students Association, says he realizes how important it is for alumni to stay involved with their former department. “We looked up and Rome was burning,” he says. “It was almost too late.”

**Molly McCullough is a student at the Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism. She plans to graduate in August.**
College students interning for major publications are hard at work in newsrooms around the Metroplex. They deal with deadline pressure, screaming bosses, extreme professional competition and the rigors of balancing a never-ending to-do list on a time scale stretched as thin as a sheet of paper. To top it off, many of them do it for free.

Instead of money and fame, students in the journalism field seek expertise and personal contacts through internships. The most they can hope for is a good reference, opportunities to generate freelance fees or, in the best possible case, a paying job.

Whether an internship includes gophering coffee and dry cleaning services or learning how to professionally maneuver in a newsroom greatly depends on the publication where a student works. One company can teach students how to be doormats, while another instructs and coaches a young reporter to become an effective producer of sound journalism.

However, the road can be long and difficult for students seeking their first internship. Nancy Eanes, career development specialist and program coordinator for the University of North Texas’ Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism, says students should first become familiar with the publication where they want to intern. Aside from staying on top of current events, students should take a close look at elements of layout, design and style to judge if the publication suits them.

“The experience of working at a smaller paper outweighs experience gained from a large publication because at a small paper there are a variety of jobs to be done and students are really needed,” she explains.

Barry Boesch, executive editor of the Denton Record-Chronicle, says that paid interns at his publication can expect to be worked into a full-time reporting role, writing basic stories with minimal supervision. Boesch adds that as students exhibit ability, they could expect to work a beat, cover spot news or work on projects to give them more hands-on experience. “I believe that with a small paper, there is a lot more opportunity to do work that matters and achieve a role because students are less likely to make an impact at a large paper,” Boesch says.

Fort Worth Weekly Editor Gayle Reaves expects her interns to be “extroverted and somewhat excited about their role as an intern and beginning journalist.” The Weekly generally hires two interns during the regular school year and two interns over the summer. Reaves suggests that students who want to become interns at her publication read the Weekly carefully and pay close attention to the stories and approaches so that they can know the publication’s standards. Reaves adds that it helps to be familiar with the

seek out publications that fit your passion
city of Fort Worth and to generate story ideas. As for doing what it takes for success, Reaves says that a job at the Weekly entails “interviewing, clerical work and doing the grunt work as well as the journalism work.”

Ruth Ann Hensley, a graduate student at the University of North Texas, completed an internship at American Way, the inflight magazine of American Airlines and its subsidiaries, to fulfill a scholarship requirement and get magazine experience. She prepared to work for American Way by scrutinizing the publication to become familiar with its tone and style. “After that, my course work in news writing and editing kicked in,” Hensley adds. American Way is a unique publication in its field because it generates two issues a month. This also meant Hensley had more opportunity to contribute to the magazine’s overall content.

With the economic downturn following September 11, which hit the airline industry particularly hard, American Way had to release several employees. Hensley began interning in the last week of the layoffs. “There was a lot of tension in the office,” Hensley recalls. “I told them all that they should do what I do—work for free.” Hensley’s upbeat attitude and persistence paid off. American Way hired her to write a feature story on microbreweries in Colorado. The assignment did not pay but the magazine covered all of her expenses and gave her a cover-quality clip complete with photos. “Colorado, the Napa of Beer” was Hensley’s first-ever cover piece.

Christina Jancic, another graduate student at North Texas, interns for the University at the Health Science Center, in Fort Worth. She was able to land the position through talking to professors and her university’s career services department. In her internship Jancic combines expertise from her bachelor’s degree in biology with her graduate training in news-editorial writing. In addition to using those skills, Jancic has made valuable contacts in the journalism business. “I think meeting new people and learning about different careers in journalism is the most important aspect of an internship,” Jancic says. Overall, Jancic said that the process of interning gives her insight into journalism and direction in her search for a future job.

Above all else, employers look critically at what students do in college. In an increasingly competitive environment, experience can mean the difference between getting the desired job and having to continue the search. To prepare for paid journalism, students must master professionalism, tenacity, time management and hard work. They must devote themselves to their chosen profession while juggling school and a personal life.

Jancic sums up the internship process this way: “Interning helps you decide what you truly want for a career. It helps you pursue your passion and be realistic about what makes you happy.”

Zac Shaffer is a senior journalism student at UNT. He graduates in May.
goal is to cover what is important to all of viewers, not just one pocket. Whatever touches the fabric of the American voter becomes the focal point for how we cover the election.”

Yet, Ward says that this election is an entirely different one from the one before because the Democrats “seems angrier” and less willing to take the fight sitting down. “So that might translate into Bush country as well,” she says. “He may not have as solid footing, or there could be a crack in the armor. But until the story develops we just don’t know.”

Members of the North Texas media who covered the 2000 election vividly recall how it turned into a chaotic scene. Rob Cartwright, WFAA’s 10 p.m. newscast producer and political producer, was in Tallahassee, Fla., when the final judgment on the 2000 election came down. “It was just an absolute media circus,” he says. “It was a pretty amazing scene. You had satellite trucks lining the street for blocks around, you had people peddling souvenirs, shirts and key rings, trying to profit from this. There were tents all over the place with mobile newsrooms, producers and reporters from all over the country from networks and local stations. You couldn’t even see out. It was just wall-to-wall media. It was surreal, because no one had ever seen that happen.”

But so much has transpired since the 2000 election, The News’ Jeffers points out. “We’ve had 9/11, we had a war, the Iraq situation, Afghanistan…I think sometimes we forget the incredible, historic election we had, and the closeness of that election because of the events that took place after.” He offers this prediction: “It’s going to be another close one this time.” Gravois agrees. “This is going to be a nasty, rough-and-tumble campaign that should be down to the wire, which is indeed exciting.”

Joyce Tsai is a student at the Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism and has written for Fort Worth Weekly.

Final Thoughts

If you would like to learn more about children like Fu and how you can help, please contact:

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