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A Real-World Voice in the Classroom

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A real-world voice

Huntsberger file:

At Linfield since 2009

B.A., The Evergreen State College,
music technology

Ph.D., University of Oregon,
communication and society

Research areas: public service
media policy, history and
electronic media technology

Appointments: Radio Preservation
Task Force; RIPE Initiative;
Broadcast Education Association

Producer: *The Pinot Chronicles:
25 Years of Oregon's International
Pinot Noir Celebration*



Michael Huntsberger, associate professor of mass communication, shares with his students years of experience in the broadcast industry. He has been named to the Radio Preservation Task Force of the Library of Congress.



Michael Huntsberger rattles off broadcast call signs like the names of old friends – KSLC, KOPB, KAOS, KBOO, KGW, KOIN.

Over the last four decades, Huntsberger has witnessed the growing pains and transformation of the broadcast industry while accumulating real-world experience that he shares with his Linfield students. He worked as a producer, engineer and consultant in public broadcasting, and managed KAOS FM Community Radio in Olympia, Wash., before earning a Ph.D. and ultimately landing at Linfield.

Now an associate professor of mass communication, he teaches classes and oversees the student radio station, KSLC 90.3 FM, and Linfield's student video club, Wildcat Productions. He continues to be a leader in the national broadcast arena as a member of the Radio Preservation Task Force of the Library of Congress, which is charged with surveying historic radio materials for the national project. (See sidebar.)

Though passionate about the industry, Huntsberger didn't plan a career in radio.

"All I ever wanted was to be a rock and roll guitar player," he says with a smile and a hint of seriousness.

He set out to do just that after college, living with a houseful of musicians and sound engineers making local radio commercials. He also volunteered as production manager at KAOS, the community radio station at The Evergreen State College. There, with no previous experience, he was thrown into the world of radio when given his first

in the classroom

assignment – broadcasting a four-day live show from the Thurston County Fair.

“We took the whole station, put it in a Volkswagen van and drove out to the fair,” he laughed. “That was a real trial by fire. Within a few months, I was doing all the morning shows. I tell students, it doesn’t matter how bad you are when you start, just do it every day for three weeks and you’ll get very comfortable.”

With a knack for speaking his mind – in a clear and booming radio voice – Huntsberger became active in national policy issues around public broadcasting, particularly those that affected small stations.

“If you are with one of the big established public broadcasters, there’s a pipeline for federal grant money that goes into your operation,” he said. “For those of us at smaller stations who don’t meet those funding criteria it was a totally different world – it was very much hand-to-mouth.”

He lobbied to widen grant programs and identify new funding mechanisms for small public broadcasters. He became involved in leadership, and served in a number of regional and national organizations – the National Federation of Community Broadcasters, Public Radio of Washington, West Coast Public Radio and the Northwest Public Affairs Network, among others.

At Linfield, students are drawn to Huntsberger’s animated teaching style, which often resembles the energy of a radio show. He runs his classes like labs and relishes the small class sizes and close relationships he’s able to form with students. The hands-on learning makes an impact on students, including Ivanna Tucker ’15, now channel assistant at NewsBeat Social, a Portland video news outlet.

“Professor Huntsberger helped me discover my passion for production and electronic media, such as video, online and multimedia,” she said. “He taught me to not be afraid to try new things, to ask questions, and if I don’t know how to do something to figure out how. He showed me that there are so many possibilities in the world outside of Linfield and how I can help make an impact.”

Tucker took part in Huntsberger’s January Term course, Mass Media in the European Union. In 2015, the class traveled to locations in England and Belgium. Last summer she was selected for a highly competitive production internship at Oregon Public Broadcasting for its daily radio show *Think Out Loud*.

“You can see his passion for what he is teaching and how he wants to share that passion with us,” added Tucker. “He encourages students to give input and feedback, so we become better media producers and critics. He always has a smile on his face and works to engage his students in an interactive way.”

The future is bright for mass communication students, particularly in multimedia and video, said Huntsberger. He teaches students to be “backpack journalists,” producing short pieces for the web.

“That’s where everything is going,” he said. “You produce a segment, you put it on YouTube or the station’s website, and then they aggregate those pieces together with a weather forecast and that’s how you do a television broadcast.”

“We have moved from a society that communicates in print to a society that communicates through audio-visual media. So being literate in how those forms work and what the techniques are for producing that content is essential in any profession.”

– Laura Davis

Preserving radio

Michael Huntsberger is part of a select group of radio broadcasting scholars in the country.

“It’s a close-knit network and we all know each other fairly well – like the Elks Club of radio,” he said.

For his efforts, last year he was appointed to the Radio Preservation Task Force (RPTF) of the Library of Congress. He is surveying libraries and other collections of historic radio materials in Oregon, including program transcriptions and artifacts from radio history. In addition to assessing the state of broadcast archives around the country, the task force will work with the Library of Congress to find out how future collections should be preserved.

According to Huntsberger, public radio stations in rural areas were started in the 1920s as agricultural extension services – a way to get weather, crop and price information out to farmers.

“Radio really knit the country together in the 1920s and ‘30s,” said Huntsberger. “When Franklin Roosevelt gave his fireside chats during World War II, on a hot summer night you could walk down the street and listen to the broadcast because 100 million people across the country were tuned in and everyone had their windows open. It was a unifying force.”

The task force is an effort to identify the scholars and designated archives for radio broadcast materials in each state. Locating broadcasting archives is a challenge, said Huntsberger.

“In a lot of cases, the material was just never preserved,” he explained. “There was no audio recording technology in the 1930s, so unless someone actually cut it into a wax disk, those things are gone.”

Oregon’s broadcasting collection is housed at the University of Oregon.