

Stanley Pliska's recollections about teaching on television in the 50s

Sweeney: You taught the first college credit class offered on television in Virginia, a course in world geography, over WVEC television on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, I guess it was in the early '60's or the late '50's. Could you tell the story of how this came about?

Pliska: *Well, how it came about I don't know. But nevertheless I was asked to consider offering a course. And I believe at that time the various TV channels probably had certain requests from the government or even demands from the government to provide so many minutes or so many hours per week of educational time. And it's no doubt this way that the university was able to get some of this TV time. There were four courses, I believe, that were offered for credit. My geography course was one. I believe that the time that I was offering my course on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday Professor Bob Young of the music department was offering a two-credit course in music. The following semester Bill Whitehurst and Burt Bowden offered a course. Bill Whitehurst offered one in Virginia history, and Dr. Bowden offered one in economics. These were half hour courses, half hour programs, and as I remember I taught three times a week, as you mentioned. And that certainly burned up the time. You may get enough material to last you an hour in the classroom, but when you get on TV there just aren't any questions. It's straight talk, and it really took a good deal of preparation. At that time we also had sessions in class on the campus. I know my classes had something like 48 students enrolled for credit. These people met every second Saturday, and the questions they could not ask on a television program they were able to ask during these Saturday sessions. I think in addition to that there were about 150 or so people who bought kits or programs. I think this cost about two or three dollars to let them know what lectures, what programs would be forthcoming so that they could prepare themselves through any additional reading or advance reading if they cared to. As far as the station is concerned, I don't know whether they did this to make me feel good, but they claimed that the viewing audience, according to their estimates for this particular program, was about 5,000. Probably what I have said for my particular course in geography would hold true for the other three courses that were being taught on television that particular year. (pg. 10-11)*

Full interview at:

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