

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF SPEECH

Studies in the arts
and sciences of
• Communication
• Media
• Performance

June 23, 1995

Dr. Bette Jean Bullert
3232 41st Avenue SW
Seattle, WA 98116

COMMUNICATION
STUDIES

Dear Dr. Bullert:

I am writing to let you know that the committee for the Joint Faculty Position in Journalism and Communication Studies at Northwestern University has completed its initial review of applications and is considering your application seriously. Your credentials appear to be appropriate for the position, and we wanted to let you know that we will be back in touch with you in September. We are now on summer hiatus, planning to reconvene in the fall to further narrow the field in order to schedule interviews with a few candidates.

Please let us know of any circumstances that might affect your application, or your availability for an interview in the fall.

Thank you very much for your interest in the joint faculty position.

Sincerely,

Peter V. Miller

Peter V. Miller
Co-Chair
Search Committee

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July 11, 1995

Professor Peter V. Miller
School of Speech
Northwestern University
Harris Hall
1881 Sheridan Road
Evanston, IL 60208-2236

Dear Prof. Miller:

I am delighted to hear that the search committee for the Joint Faculty Position in Journalism and Communication Studies is seriously considering my application. From the description in The Chronicle of Higher Education, it seems like a dream job, and potentially, a perfect fit.

I am currently working on my book, The Anatomy of Controversy: PBS, Independent Producers and the Promise of Public Television which will be finished this fall when I am a Visiting Scholar at the University of Washington School of Public Affairs. I am also teaching a summer class at Antioch's branch campus in Seattle, and working on two video projects.

So far, I have had two tenure-track job offers for positions that would begin in January, and I haven't turned either down firmly. One reason I have stalled is because I would like more information about the status of my application at Northwestern University, ideally, an educated guess about whether it is likely I will be among those interviewed. I realize this is a question that may have no certain answer given the summer hiatus and your time table for reviewing applications, but if you do have any additional information, even about the number of candidates under consideration after the initial review, I'd appreciate it if you would let me know. Then I can make my own educated guess about my future.

Thank you very much. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Bette Jean Bullert, Ph.D.

May 5, 1995

Search Committee Chair
Joint Position in Journalism and Speech
1881 Sheridan Road, Room
Northwestern University
Evanston, IL 60208

To the Search Committee:

I am both a scholar and a practitioner of communications with experience as a journalist, a documentary producer and a teacher. I am also under contract with Rutgers University Press to publish my Ph.D. dissertation on the politics of public broadcasting, "The Anatomy of Controversy: PBS, Independent Producers and the Promise of Public Television" (March 1995). This book will be part of the Rutgers series, "Communication, Media and Culture," and will be finished this year.

I am very intrigued by the position you describe because I am looking for a place in academia that stresses collaborative research between scholars on topics of mutual interest where politics, the media and rhetoric overlap. One reason this interests me is because I am the product of an interdisciplinary education. I attended The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash., in 1975, and continued my education at Boston University with a B.A. in philosophy in 1977. I studied with the philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre, and the historian, Howard Zinn. Then I went to Oxford University for an M. Litt. degree in the history of ideas and politics studying with Charles Taylor and Bryan Wilson. My M. Litt. thesis on Adam Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment (understood as a social and intellectual movement) probed the relationship between a philosopher, his society and the ideas contained in his philosophical texts. In March, I received my Ph.D. in communications from the University of Washington, a department that encourages interdisciplinary research. In my case, I studied qualitative sociology with Howard S. Becker, and rhetoric with John Campbell in Speech Communications.

Theoretical Focus

My research in political communication is grounded in my professional experience as a journalist and a documentary film maker. I drew on this experience when formulating research questions and in gaining access to key players inside public television and the independent producing

community. The making of controversy is a collective activity involving the decisions of producers, programmers, journalists, reviewers and special interest groups. My case-studies bring to light the subtle forces that have effectively constrained the style and content of documentaries broadcast with the PBS logo during the past decade. They also serve as the backdrop for the current debate over government funding for public television. Predictably, all the programs that became controversial addressed divisive issues such as the nuclear weapons industry, AIDS and the gay rights movement, the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and economic inequality, but not all programs produced on these topics became controversial. Many of those that did were produced by independent producers and originally had theatrical releases before they aired on public television. I interviewed key participants in the controversies and analyzed core documents including letters, press releases, reviews, news articles and other documents. This approach illuminated precisely how journalists, reviewers, programmers and interest groups worked together as each sought to frame and often seriously constrain viewers' perceptions of these provocative works.

My book analyzes the controversies in light of the recent and unfolding debates about government funding for public broadcasting. More broadly, these debates indicate the rising power of organized, religious and politically conservative interest groups and their influence in the on-going struggle to define what constitutes legitimate American culture in a situation where little common ground exists.

Teaching Experience

This summer I am teaching a course on visual fieldwork at the Seattle campus of Antioch University. The course is designed to train the eyes of scholars by using the camera as a research tool that provides visual information about themselves and their subject matter. I am currently teaching video production at the Washington State Reformatory in Monroe, a medium security prison near Seattle, where I hope someday to produce a film about prison life.

At the University of Washington, I have worked as an instructor in media writing and as a teaching assistant in the standard undergraduate courses: the mass media and society, radio broadcast journalism and the history of communications.

Media and Production Experience

I have worked as a wire-service reporter for Reuters, I have also produced news segments and documentaries. All my documentaries have been broadcast on public television. In addition to shorter works for news programs on local public and commercial television, I have produced three independent documentaries, two of which have aired nationally on PBS during prime-time. My work has also appeared on "The MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour."

My first program, "God and Money" (1986) is a one-hour documentary examining the U.S. Catholic bishops' critique of the American economic system. My second documentary, "Circle of Plenty" (1987), is a half-hour piece that explores the promise of bio-intensive agriculture for

a hungry world. It shows how simple, bio-intensive gardening techniques have improved the health of people in rural Mexico and elsewhere.

My most recent work, "Earl Robinson: Ballad of an American" (1994), is a one-hour profile of the life and music of the composer of "Joe Hill," "Black and White," "The House I Live In" and other songs that captured the progressive spirit of his generation. The documentary, narrated by Judy Collins and featuring performances of Robinson songs by Joan Baez, Frank Sinatra, Paul Robeson, Three Dog Night and Peter, Paul & Mary, premiered on public television station, KCTS/Seattle, in April 1994. "Ballad of an American" will be broadcast by select PBS affiliates within a year through the Central Educational Network.

I am currently working on two, partially funded video projects. One is an animated portrait of Yip Harburg, the lyricist who wrote all the lyrics to "The Wizard of Oz" and "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" The other is short video for a local historical society about the arrival of white settlers from the perspective of the pioneers and the Native Americans who met them.

My theoretical explorations in communications and my professional experience as a creator of media images significantly enrich one another. I consider my production work theoretically grounded in so far as I have developed a heightened awareness of the ramifications of the technology, the persistence of aesthetic and journalistic norms, the contingency of choices made when conceptualizing, producing and promoting a story, and the institutional or organizational constraints operative in production and distribution. These are the tangible factors that influence the transmission of culture. My professional experience continues to breathe life into my scholarly research about whose voices or perspectives are allowed expression in our society, in what context and how.

I have also published and presented articles on my research on public television and on my earlier research in the history of ideas.

My professional experience as a documentary film maker grounds my scholarly research in communications. I have a long-standing interest in the history of communications that derives in part from my previous theoretical work at Oxford University and Boston University. I am particularly interested in the more subtle cultural impact of innovations in communication technologies (from the early printing press to photographs, musical recordings and telephones) on ordinary people's lives. I am also interested in comparing previous revolutions in communications with the one we're currently undergoing, especially regarding how the new technologies change our ways of thinking and interacting.

I've enclosed my curriculum vitae with credit list, a copy of an article recently published in Wide Angle, a review of "Earl Robinson: Ballad of an American" from The San Francisco Examiner, a description of the class I am teaching this summer, a letter from Rutgers University Press, and a list of four references. Those references are Professors Howard S. Becker, Roger Simpson, Edward Bassett and Anthony Chan. Because the job position described involves news

media experience, I am also sending you a sample tape with excerpts of my public affairs and documentary work.

Please contact me at (206) 932-8973 if you'd like more information or have any questions. You can also reach me on the internet at bullert@u.washington.edu until the end of June. I am attending the International Communication Association annual conference in New Mexico May 25-29 and will be on a panel to discuss public broadcasting on Friday, May 26. If anyone from your department will be there, perhaps we could meet for coffee. In any case, I look forward to hearing from you and hearing more about life at Northwestern.

Sincerely,

Bette Jean Bullert, Ph.D.