

The August 29-30, 2025, [Beyond Our Screens: Reimagining Critical Media Literacy](#) symposium is taking place in honor of three anniversaries at the University of Notre Dame tied to television education on campus. The first originates in July 1955, when Notre Dame launched WNDU, a commercial broadcasting station and NBC network affiliate, right on campus grounds (where Geddes Hall now stands). In the dedication program, Notre Dame president Fr. Theodore Hesburgh wrote that he hoped the university's ownership of WNDU would lead to "a deeper sense of how television can be used as a force for the betterment of Mankind in our day," and he held the belief that "Notre Dame should be at the forefront of the great universities employing this new medium for the benefit of its students and scholarship in general." While the station would quickly thrive, Notre Dame struggled for decades to build a television curriculum primarily due to a dearth of committed university faculty.

Ironically, the best television education on campus in subsequent years wasn't even available to Notre Dame students. Only local high school students were welcomed into WJA-TV, a Junior Achievement educational program that WNDU GM William Thomas Hamilton began in 1960. At the outset, WJA-TV offered teenagers only limited television production experience, but the project skyrocketed when WNDU promotions director Dave Williams took charge and transformed WJA-TV into *Beyond Our Control* (BOC), a sketch comedy TV parody series that aired from 1968 to 1986. The comprehensive educational framework that Williams devised put students in charge of all aspects of commercial TV production, including ad sales, and taught two dozen teenagers each year about commercial television's conventions through making a show that deconstructed them humorously. BOC's impact proved lasting: while numerous alumni launched successful careers in entertainment and media, all participants emerged with an invaluable foundation in media literacy.

Meanwhile, media education for Notre Dame students gained renewed momentum in the 1990s with the establishment of the Department of Film, Television, and Theatre (previously called Communication and Theatre). Initially, the middle T in FTT existed in name only, as students could only major in either film or theater. But in September 2005, through the steadfast efforts of faculty members including Christine Becker, Karen Heisler, Susan Ohmer, and Gary Sieber, a dedicated television concentration was launched. Finally, a well-rounded liberal arts-driven curriculum in television history, theory, and production was offered at Notre Dame, thus fulfilling Fr. Hesburgh's vision fifty years after WNDU's inception.

These notable anniversaries of WNDU (70th), WJA-TV (65th), and FTT's TV concentration (20th) offer a unique opportunity for this roundtable to examine the contemporary relationships between critical media literacy and the media industries, thereby pointing the way toward a future of screen media that honors Fr. Hesburgh's pioneering mid-20th Century perspective while adapting to the rapidly changing landscape of mass communication.