

Paying Costly Dues

by Bob Papper and Michael Gerhard

“My parents help me a lot. If I had to live off of just what I’m making, if I had to cover my own car payment and my own car insurance....” Hermon Walker trails off, mulling over the financial impossibility. “Without the help of my parents, it really would be a struggle.”

A year out of Ball State University, Walker is in his first job: a reporter for WTOV-TV in Wheeling/Steubenville, the country’s 138th market. He makes \$8.18 an hour (about \$17,000 a year plus overtime). “I’ve heard salaries here even around \$7.00 an hour for photographers. It’s very difficult. There was one photog here I know that did not have any furniture. His parents came by and gave him a mat to sleep on until he was able to get some furniture.”

Walker is not complaining; he says he knew going in what the salaries are like, and he’s happy he found a job so quickly.

“On the good side, we’re all relatively young and kind of band together.” And, Walker says, they all “hope it will work out down the road.”

“I’ve heard this from a lot of them,” says Kyle McAlister, news director at KTAB-TV in Abilene, TX. “‘My folks have decided that they’re going to help us out,’ or, ‘I saved my money during college because I knew my first year working in TV I wouldn’t make very much.’ You maybe can’t eat out as much, and when mom and dad give you 20 bucks, you make it last for a long time. But for the most part, I feel that the ones I have here that are really, really dedicated to journalism realize and understand that this is paying your dues.”

That’s the phrase that comes up time and again. “Paying your dues” means low

entry-level wages as you learn the business. But more and more, students, young professionals, and even news directors are raising some questions as broadcast news rapidly becomes one of the lowest-paying jobs a college graduate can find.

“You can’t make \$12,000 go very far,” says Jim Turpin, executive news director at KAKE-TV in Wichita, KS. “People just aren’t interested in working at the poverty level, no matter how idealistic they are, and I don’t blame them. We as broadcasters have taken advantage of this, saying, ‘Well, if I can get this person to work for me even if it’s just for a year or two, and I can pay them nothing, then I’m going to do it because it looks good on my bottom line.’”

Mike Holmes says he’s thinking about leaving the business. “[Little] money, no benefits, things along that line. It wears on you getting up at a quarter of four every morning.” Holmes is news director at WDNY AM and FM in Dansville, NY. He started there straight out of college three years ago at “around \$12,000.” He says he’s now up to about \$13,000. To help make ends meet, he also writes for a small weekly paper and works for another station on Sundays. He generally takes Saturdays off except during football season, when he works for that second station. He says he’s not complaining either, it was his choice to go into the field and stay there. But he also wants to stay near family in the area. “I’ve considered going back to school to teach—to get a teaching certificate,” says Holmes. That would allow him to stay nearby, and it would “pay a lot more.”

“People do what they have to do,” laments news director Dean Adams at KAAL-TV in Austin, MN. Some of his full-time people work elsewhere part-time. “One waitressing on the side, another working for court producer on the weekends,” says Adams.

McAlister says Abilene's low cost of living helps, but his people scramble to keep afloat, too. "One is actually working two other jobs to survive; the other one that I just hired, his wife works, so he's kind of a supplemental income to hers, working at a radio station in town and also Pier One Imports."

"You can't support a family on what we pay, some of these starting salaries," says Bill Evans, news director at WPSD-TV in Paducah, KY.

It can be pretty rough just supporting yourself. Scott Clark has spent the last year as news director (and morning man) at WLQH AM-FM in Chiefland, FL. He describes his pay as "pretty bad." In dollars and cents, that's "about minimum wage." Not much after 19 years in the business, but Clark says it's about what most people at the station make. "Living is cheap down here. I don't ride around in a Cadillac, but I have a roof over my head." That may be because Clark lives with his parents—which is why he returned to the area. He doesn't expect to stay.

"Right now, we're making an effort here at our station to increase salaries," says Adams. "We don't want reporters and anchors working part time jobs, waitressing, delivering pizzas, or who knows what they're doing. We want people to concentrate on their jobs."

"I'm doing real well," says Susann Gamble, news director at WPDR-AM and WDDC-FM in Portage, WI, who has been at the station for a decade. "I developed a personality that people like around here. Then I got offered the job to edit the local newspaper here, and that's when I got my own kind of over a barrel. So I'll make around \$27,000 this year. Plus I'll make another \$3000 writing for the local newspaper."

She just hired another full-time reporter for \$16,500.

“I’ve had other reporters that didn’t stay more than a year probably at that salary, especially if they’re men,” says Gamble. Her newest hire is a woman. “Her husband is a police officer in town, so it’s sort of a second income. She came from 16 years in the newspaper business where she wasn’t making any more money than she is here, and she likes this a lot better. She’s anchored in the community.”

Those community ties help keep people—and lower costs.

“When you’re looking at a small town like we are here, I make pretty good money,” says Aaron Sims, news director at KYOO AM-FM in Bolivar, MO. He’s been at the station for four years and in radio since 1986. “I make \$375 a week (\$19,500 a year) plus benefits like insurance and paid vacation. I grew up on a farm [in the area], and what farmers are doing these days is nothing compared to what I’m making now.” Sims’s wife works elsewhere as a receptionist, so he says they’re doing okay. “I do hope someday to move up further in news, and if I can ever put some money away and get the right backing, maybe get my own small station some where I can do things just exactly the way I want them. But that’s in the future some where.”

Marianne Marosan is news director at WXXL-FM in Leesburg/Orlando, FL. But she says that’s deceiving. “News is a secondary job.” She’s really an air personality, a sidekick. “That’s the only way that I get paid well. Most of the jobs full-time in radio news average \$21,000 to \$24,000 a year in this market. Some are as low as \$14,000 a year.”

“As far as making ends meet, I’m not struggling by any means, but it’s definitely a pay cut from what I was doing at first,” says Lee Hauser, a producer at WWAY-TV in Wilmington, NC. Right out of college, Hauser took a job selling life insurance—where he averaged “about

\$550 a week (\$28,600 a year).” He bought a car and made a down payment on a condo. Then he decided, “This is not what I want to be doing for the rest of my life.”

He called his journalism professor, Bill Bolduc, at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, who knew about a producer opening at WWAY-TV. “I had to get a roommate, of course, to help me split the expenses,” says Hauser. But he’s happy with his decision.

Not everyone is prepared to make that sacrifice.

“I just had a young lady who wanted a job with me,” says McAlister, “and she was working for a cable company, and she told me to come work here she would have to take about a 50 percent pay cut. And I told her, ‘Well, that’s probably true, but as I tell every college graduate or soon to be college graduate, if you’re getting into this business for the money, you’re getting into it for the wrong reason, because the money’s not there.’” Neither is the young woman—who decided to stay with the cable company.

Starting Pay - Dollars and Sense

“I know there are markets that are paying \$10,000 to \$12,000,” says Turpin. “You can’t live on that.”

The Annual RTNDA/Ball State University Survey does not collect actual starting salaries, although the range is clear from the low end of the full time pay for typical starting positions. The news directors (and others) that we spoke with for this article say these are their current, starting, full-time salaries:

Abilene, TX (market #160) ... KTAB-TV ... \$10,500 (minimum wage for some) - \$16,500

Austin, MN (market #153) ... KAAL-TV ... \$16,000 - \$17,000

Bozeman, MT (market #192) ... KCTZ-TV ... about \$15,000 for reporters

Chiefland, FL ... WLQH AM-FM ... about \$10,500

Dansville, NY ... WDNV AM-FM ... \$12,000 for news director

Evansville, IN (market #95) ... WFIE-TV ... \$17,000 - \$18,000 for reporters and photographers

Johnstown, PA (market #92) ... WJAC-TV ... \$16,000 for photographer, \$17,000 - \$18,000 for reporter

Lansing, MI (market #105) ... WSYM-TV ... \$18,000 for reporters

Longmont (Denver), CO ... KLMO-AM ... about \$15,000 for news director

Midland/Odessa, TX ... KRIL-AM ... about \$14,000 (with experience)

Nashville, TN (market #33) ... WTVF-TV ... \$19,000 for AP's

Paducah, KY (market #79) ... WPSD-TV ... \$20,000 minimum (up from as low as \$14,500 in 1997)

Palm Springs, CA (market #159) ... KESQ-TV, KUNA-TV, KDFX-TV ... \$17,000 - \$18,000

Portage, WI ... WPDR-AM and WDDC-FM ... \$16,500 for reporter

Wheeling/Steubenville (market #138) ... WTOV-TV ... \$17,000 for reporter, about \$15,000 for photographers

Yakima, WA (market #124) ... KIMA-TV ... \$16,000 - \$18,000 for a reporter/photographer

“Pretty sad,” says Erin Gilhuly, news director at KESQ-TV, KUNA-TV, and KDFX-TV in Palm Springs, CA. “When I started here I was making \$15,000 a year when I started on the

desk four years ago. So they've gone up, obviously, but not a lot."

"I went home [to Indianapolis] for the holidays," says Walker, "and there were signs in the windows at Burger King and McDonald's for \$7.50, \$8.00 an hour (about \$16,000 a year), and you don't need a college degree."

Comparison with the rest of the world

Of all the possible career choices a young college graduate could make, broadcast news now offers among the lowest possible starting salaries.

Typical Starting Salaries by Occupation

| | |
|--|------------|
| Computer Engineer (bachelor's degree only) | \$39,722 |
| Engineer (bachelor's degree only) | \$38,500 |
| Actuary | \$37,600* |
| Inspectors & Compliance Officers | \$36,140* |
| Computer Programmer | \$35,167 |
| Economics (bachelor's degree only) | \$31,300 |
| Geology (bachelor's degree only) | \$30,900 |
| Paralegal | \$29,300 |
| Marketing | \$29,000 |
| Public Relations | \$25,477** |

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| Advertising | \$27,000 |
| Online News Field | \$25,000** |
| Chemist (bachelor's degree only) | \$25,000 |
| Forester/Soil Conservationist | \$24,800 |
| Physical Therapist Assistant | \$24,000* |
| Writing, Research and/or Editing for Publications | \$23,768** |
| Computer Operators | \$22-32,750 |
| Elementary School Teacher | \$20-25,000 |
| Correctional Officers | \$20,200-22,600* |
| Social & Human Service Assistants | \$15-24,000 |
| U.S. Army E-4 | \$14,230.80*** |
| Radio & TV News | \$12-20,000**** |

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Association of Colleges and Employers, and Interactive Marketing & Research. All data is from 1997 except those with one asterisk (*) which are from 1996 and two asterisks (**) which are from 1998 and Radio & TV News, which is current. ***Any college graduate would typically start as an E-4. The military also provides free room, board, medical and dental benefits, clothing allowance, tax-free shopping privileges, travel opportunities, 30 days paid vacation (leave), will pay off up to \$65,000 in college loans and award up to \$12,000 as a signing bonus. ****The Annual RTNDA/Ball State University Survey does not specifically collect starting salaries, but it's clear from the data that almost all full-time starting positions fall within this range—although, as noted earlier, some people are paid

less and some may be paid more.

Supply & Demand

“As an industry, there’s good reason to be concerned about what we pay or what we don’t pay people. But it’s the marketplace at work,” says Mark Carros, news director at WJAC-TV in Johnstown, PA.

“In small markets, in the past,” says Adams, “I’ve dealt with different general managers who’ve said, ‘Well, if someone doesn’t want to work here for \$12,000, we’ve got a stack of tapes of people who will.’”

There are plenty of young people ready to work for little money and plenty of stations ready—if not anxious—to let them. Figures from the beginning of this decade suggest that there are as many as 10 fresh, college graduates seeking each available TV position—and that’s just counting the journalism, broadcast, and communication majors. There are more jobs now, but the excess supply over demand clearly remains. That doesn’t explain the low starting pay in radio, where you don’t see that kind of surplus labor pool.

“A lot of people want to get in,” says Wes Hood, operations manager at KLMO-AM in Longmont/Denver, CO. “Even at the salaries, a lot of people just see it as a fun job. I don’t make a lot of money, but I like what I’m doing, so I don’t mind. I’d rather do this than sitting in a job that paid \$60,000 a year and go home grumpy every day.”

That’s probably the other part of the picture. The glamour and general appeal of the business.

I find in this business that people will work for anything,” says Gilhuly. “There are so many people who want to do what we do that there’s always somebody who’s willing to work for not a lot of money. Just like I was. The phone rings all day long, ‘I’ll take anything, I’ll do anything.’”

“When you got a million and 10 people trying to break in as dj’s,” says Sims, “you got owners, where they’re going to pay what they can get by with paying because they’re in business.”

“I start most of my people at \$20,000,” says Caryn Brooks, news director at WSYM-TV in Lansing, MI. “Not much more than that. And I still get hundreds of tapes for reporter jobs, and I get them from people in other markets making \$17,000.”

“I know at one time,” says McAlister, “one of the stations here in town, some of their employees were actually eligible for food stamps and federal assistance because they were making so low. I don’t think any of our people are that low. What I’m paying my people here is a little bit higher than what I got when I started, and I actually started in this market, in Abilene, in 1989, and so it hasn’t gone up a lot, but they’re making a little more than I made in my first job here 11 years ago.”

That’s really the issue. Salaries in this business, which have never been considered high, especially at the starting level, have simply not kept pace. With advancement primarily by moving up in market size, turnover is high. With a plentiful source of labor, as positions have turned over, salaries frequently reverted back to an earlier and lower starting level. Over time, as inflation decreases buying power, wages that used to be considered low are more and more often abusive.

“My first job in television was in 1977 at WTVH-TV in Syracuse,” says Carros, “and I started then at more than kids are starting here (Johnstown, PA).”

“I was a reporter for the ABC station here and I was making \$14,500 (right out of college),” says McAlister. “Probably starting reporters here now make about \$16,500.” But with inflation, \$14,500 when McAlister started in 1989 is equal to \$19,984 today.

“I don’t think the salaries were great when I started out 17 years ago,” says Brooks. I remember working for \$10,000 dollars, and that was considered great right out of graduate school.” Great or not, that \$10,000 starting out 17 years ago is \$17,926 today—not much less than Brooks is now paying experienced people in their second job.

Bill Evans, news director at WPSD-TV in Paducah, KY, says he started as a sports director in El Dorado, AR in 1982 at \$11,500 a year. Today, that’s the equivalent of \$20,615—about what Evans says he now pays for experienced reporters.

“Many of the starting salaries are what I was getting in the late ‘70s,” says Adams. “That just amazes me.”

Moving from nostalgia to hard numbers, if these are today’s salaries:

| | | | |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Current Salary | \$12,000/year | \$16,000/year | \$20,000/year |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|

the comparable pay, adjusted for inflation, would have been:

| | | | |
|------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1995 | \$11,220 | \$14,960 | \$18,699 |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1990 | 9,622 | 12,829 | 16,037 |
| 1985 | 7,921 | 10,562 | 13,202 |
| 1980 | 6,066 | 8,088 | 10,110 |
| 1975 | 3,961 | 5,281 | 6,601 |
| 1970 | 2,856 | 3,809 | 4,761 |

Source: Annual inflation figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Turnover

“When people aren’t being paid enough to live on, they’re always looking to leave,” says Adams.

“In a year and a half, I’ve hired more than 30 people,” says Gilhuly. But she only has a staff of 40. “There’s a lot of turnover, obviously. I’ve probably hired more than [30]. It says something about turnover.”

“In their next jump, and I have one or two who are good enough,” says McAlister, “I tell them, in your next jump, they will more than double their salary, and having that hope is good for them. That’s a good goal for them to shoot for.”

“It’s very, very weird,” says Gilhuly. “There are just so many people who want to get into this business. And it makes you sit there and go, ‘Why? When you can do 900 other

things for a lot more money.’ It makes you think, ‘God, there must be something in it that’s really terrific.’ And there is, if you have a passion for it.

But that passion is something that more and more news directors seem to think is missing these days.

“What I see more of are people getting out of school and they feel as though they shouldn’t have to work for, say, \$18,000 a year,” says Bob Freeman, news director at WFIE-TV in Evansville, IN. “They really feel like they should be starting out in the \$25,000 to \$30,000 range, and a market this size just doesn’t bear that kind of starting salary for an entry-level reporter. And I’m not seeing people who are hungry and have that desire.”

“We want this person, coming out of college, to report, to shoot, to edit, to produce his own piece, and we expect a Walter Cronkite,” says T.J. Close, news director at KIMA-TV in Yakima, WA. “It ain’t going to happen. And then we’re going to pay him 15, 16, 17 grand a year. That’s tough. He can go out and flip burgers for that. We’ve got a McDonald’s here paying \$7.25 an hour. They can’t find bodies either. We’re competing with that. That’s 15 grand a year, and you don’t have to worry about lugging 60 pounds of gear around.”

“I think there’s going to be a decline in the quality of the people who are coming into the field, and I think we’ve already in some cases seen that,” says Carros. “There’s not the passion, there’s not the drive. Rare is the reporter nowadays who comes in the door, covers the story and says, ‘This is such a great story that I’m going to stay on this tonight, boss, because I want to get this angle or that angle.’ It’s become, much more, ‘Well, 5 o’clock. I’m either off the clock or I’m on overtime.’”

But Freeman thinks money is less important—or at least should be. “I don’t think that

people who succeed in this business got into it because of the money. I didn't. If money were my sole objective, then I would have thought, 'I want to be a doctor,' or 'I want to be a lawyer.' It was like, 'No, I want to be a news guy.' I like that. And, yeah, I'm not going to make as much money as a doctor or a lawyer, but I'm going to have more fun than they are."

That's the way Hauser sees it: "I'd take this job over any other job anywhere. I honestly would."

But Gilhuly sees someone like Hauser as an increasingly unusual employee. "There are a lot of people who are willing to do it and want to do it because they have a passion for it. But there are also a ton of people who simply want to do it because they want to be on the air."

"We've had a degradation in the quality of candidate that's coming in to the business," says Turpin. "I shudder to think what it's going to be like in three to five years if we don't do something. We just can't continue to pay people \$12,000 to \$15,000 a year and expect to attract a quality candidate into the field. People are actually thinking, 'Gosh, how am I going to put food on the table?' Imagine that."

Quality

It's hard to tell whether there has been a change in the quality of the people going into the field. Anecdotally, many college professors say they're losing some of their best students to better-paying areas of communication—or completely different fields. But the evidence is less clear.

The data from the last 22 years show little change among high school students planning to

go into communication. According to figures from the Educational Testing Service and The College Board, the overall percentage of high school seniors planning to major in communication in college has slipped from its high of 5 percent in the late 1980s and 1990 to 4 percent since 1991. SAT scores among high school seniors planning to major in communication in college have remained largely unchanged. Those students have consistently been in about the middle of the pack in test scores: well below the sciences, math, and language and literature ... well above technical and vocational, public affairs, and education. Of course, these figures are only for high school seniors planning to go into communication. Many of them will change their minds, others will come into the field, and the figures are for communication students, generally, and are not broken down by specific area.

“We’re getting what we pay for,” says Turpin. “There are some very dedicated, talented people coming out of college who want to do journalism for all the right reasons. But the best and the brightest in a large sense are gravitating to other fields where they can actually make a livable wage.”

“I know people that I’ve worked with—and that have worked here—that have gotten out of the business because they’ve gone into other fields where they’re making a lot more money,” says John Pastorek, news director at WBRZ-TV in Baton Rouge, LA. “And one of the fields that’s really taking people out of ours is the computer industry. They’re very talented and creative people, which you have to be to be in TV news, and they’re going into computers and making a lot more money doing that.”

“I think we may lose some very talented people because we can’t be or have not been competitive with the outside world, so to speak. And that’s unfortunate,” says Mike Cutler, news

director at WTVF-TV in Nashville, TN.

The Future

Most of the news directors we spoke with see change as unlikely.

“It’s going to take a concerted effort by broadcasters saying, ‘Okay, we’re going to do real news because we think that will drive real ratings. To do real news, we’re going to invest in really good reporters, and to do that, we know we’ve got to spend more money than we do now.’ That’s the only way it’s going to change, and I am not confident that it’s going to happen,” says Turpin.

“How can you expect to pay employees bunches more when they’re serving a smaller audience and advertisers are tougher to come by,” says Cutler. “We’re only going to demand more. That won’t change. That’s the beast now. We have to do so much more to bring in the same revenues as in years past.”

“We’re just scraping along, to tell you the truth,” says Clyde Butter, news director and owner of KRIL-AM in Midland, TX. Ten years ago, the station had eight to ten full-time employees. Today, Butter, age 68, works six days a week and has only one other full-time person on staff. “We’re just getting by, and we’re not able to pay much at all.” Butter blames the new competitive pressures in the marketplace. “It’s been my life for 50 years, and I like the business, although I like it a lot less today than I did 20 years ago or 10 years ago because of the changes.”

“We shouldn’t be known as a rock bottom business,” says Adams. “We have a

responsibility to pay people decent living wages, and to help them along in their careers.”

It’s possible that there won’t be a choice. The Annual Survey of (University) Journalism and Mass Communication Enrollments, conducted by Gerald Kosicki and Lee Becker, hints at possible significant changes.

Overall, enrollment in communication fields is up 2.3 percent in 1997 (the latest year available)—for the fourth year in a row, although the number of graduating seniors has remained steady.

There’s some evidence that students are moving away from traditional areas of broadcasting (as well as journalism, advertising, and public relations). The percentage of students in telecommunication programs appears reasonably steady, with 10.6 percent of all communication students in 1995, 12.0 percent in 1996 and 11.7 percent in 1997. Many of those students are not interested in broadcast news, however. In contrast, students specifically in broadcast news programs have plunged from 12.4 percent of the total in 1995 to 9.9 percent in 1996 to 8.5 percent in 1997. That means the overall trend is almost certainly down and perhaps down substantially, even as more and more students move into other, new or new-sounding areas of communication—all of which pay more money, perhaps coincidentally.

Maybe some of those students have been listening to some of the news directors we spoke with. Freeman is optimistic, and his son, Chris, plans to pursue a career in broadcasting. But that seems to be the exception.

“Companies are saying to news directors, okay, do more with less,” says Turpin. “That’s been the trend for a long time. I’ll be honest with you, I don’t know that I could recommend to young people I know who are really strong journalism candidates. I love my job, and I love the

company for which I work, but I’ve worked for some companies that just chewed you up and spit you out. It’s tough.”

“If my son or daughter or niece or nephew or good friend was looking to get into a good, starting profession, I certainly wouldn’t tell him to get into journalism,” says Evans. “Not for the money, anyway.”

“My son is 16 and is thinking about careers,” says Carros, “and he’s talking about, ‘I’d like to be a sportscaster or go into news, or something like that.’ Frankly, I’ve discouraged him from doing that. I question whether the business of television news is something that I’d like to see him go into because of concerns for the financial, the nomadic lifestyle that you have. Any career is a gamble, but if the potential payout is enough, the gamble might be worth it. But in terms of a career in broadcast news, I question whether the payoff is there for at least my son to make that kind of a gamble.”

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TV News Salaries

| | Average | Median | Low | High |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| News Director | \$66,000 | \$56,000 | \$20,000 | \$250,000 |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| Assistant News Director | 51,600 | 50,000 | 18,000 | 110,000 |
| Executive Producer | 43,300 | 40,000 | 20,000 | 95,000 |
| Managing Editor | 49,500 | 47,500 | 25,000 | 100,000 |
| Assignment Editor | 29,500 | 29,300 | 16,000 | 58,000 |
| News Producer | 26,400 | 24,000 | 12,000 | 65,000 |
| News Anchor | 62,100 | 44,000 | 9,000 | 800,000 |
| Weathercaster | 51,100 | 40,000 | 14,000 | 250,000 |
| Sports Anchor | 46,600 | 33,000 | 15,000 | 260,000 |
| News Reporter | 29,200 | 24,000 | 14,000 | 130,000 |
| News Writer | 25,900 | 24,000 | 8,000 | 50,000 |
| News Assistant | 20,800 | 20,000 | 4,000 | 42,000 |
| Sports Reporter | 27,600 | 22,000 | 7,000 | 153,000 |
| Photographer | 25,100 | 23,000 | 12,000 | 60,000 |
| Tape Editor | 23,000 | 22,000 | 6,000 | 55,000 |
| Graphics Specialist | 25,900 | 24,000 | 7,000 | 44,500 |
| Internet Specialist | 25,700 | 26,000 | 11,000 | 40,000 |

Overall, TV news salaries were up 4.1 percent from the year before (an improvement over the year earlier, when salaries were up 3.6 percent). With inflation running a low 1.6 percent for the year, that means a gain in real wages of 2.5 percent. The biggest winners were assistant news directors, assignment editors, and the anchor desk—all of which rose 7.3 to 8.5 percent. The biggest losers were executive producers and graphics and Internet specialists—all of which actually dropped from the year before. During the last four years, the biggest salary growth has included news managers (top two positions) and photographers—all of which have shown growth

in the teens (15 - 19 percent) with producers and weathercasters not far behind (9 - 11 percent). The median (midpoint) is probably the best gauge of what people typically make.

Median TV News Salaries by Market Size

| | Market 1-25 | 26 - 50 | 51 - 100 | 101 - 150 | 150+ |
|-------------------------|-------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| News Director | \$115,000 | \$82,000 | \$68,000 | \$50,000 | \$41,000 |
| Assistant News Director | 85,000 | 56,900 | 50,000 | 32,000 | 30,000 |
| Executive Producer | 65,000 | 50,000 | 42,500 | 27,000 | 30,000 |
| Managing Editor | 60,000 | 50,000 | 37,000 | 35,000 | 48,500 |
| Assignment Editor | 40,000 | 30,000 | 29,500 | 25,000 | 23,500 |
| News Producer | 43,000 | 30,000 | 26,000 | 20,000 | 19,000 |
| News Anchor | 148,000 | 90,000 | 50,000 | 37,000 | 24,500 |
| Weathercaster | 82,500 | 75,000 | 45,000 | 35,000 | 25,000 |
| Sports Anchor | 100,000 | 64,000 | 40,000 | 28,500 | 21,000 |
| News Reporter | 61,000 | 35,000 | 25,500 | 20,000 | 17,000 |
| News Writer | 35,000 | 22,300 | 20,000 | 10,000 | 12,000 |
| News Assistant | 30,000 | 19,600 | 17,500 | 14,000 | 8,000 |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Sports Reporter | 46,500 | 26,000 | 26,000 | 21,000 | 17,000 |
| Photographer | 39,000 | 30,000 | 24,000 | 20,000 | 17,000 |
| Tape Editor | 33,500 | 23,000 | 20,000 | 15,000 | 10,000 |
| Graphics Specialist | 40,000 | 24,000 | 21,000 | 29,000 | 18,000 |
| Internet Specialist | 34,000 | 30,000 | 24,500 | 18,000 | 26,000 |

As always, with few exceptions, the larger the market, the larger the salary.

Median TV News Salaries by Staff Size

| | 51+ | 31 - 50 | 21 - 30 | 11 - 20 | 1 - 10 |
|-------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| News Director | \$100,000 | \$70,000 | \$50,000 | \$42,000 | \$30,500 |
| Assistant News Director | 70,000 | 50,000 | 32,000 | 29,000 | 23,000 |
| Executive Producer | 60,000 | 40,000 | 27,500 | 24,000 | 42,000 |
| Managing Editor | 60,000 | 42,500 | 49,000 | 30,000 | 57,300 |
| Assignment Editor | 35,000 | 30,000 | 25,000 | 25,000 | 31,000 |
| News Producer | 34,000 | 25,000 | 20,000 | 18,500 | 27,000 |
| News Anchor | 100,000 | 52,000 | 34,000 | 25,000 | 19,500 |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Weathercaster | 80,000 | 45,000 | 35,000 | 24,000 | 24,000 |
| Sports Anchor | 82,500 | 40,000 | 28,000 | 23,000 | 17,500 |
| News Reporter | 45,000 | 25,500 | 20,000 | 18,000 | 18,000 |
| News Writer | 28,000 | 20,000 | 23,300 | 19,000 | 18,000 |
| News Assistant | 20,000 | 16,500 | 15,500 | 25,000 | 15,000 |
| Sports Reporter | 34,000 | 23,500 | 20,000 | 17,000 | 18,000 |
| Photographer | 33,500 | 25,000 | 19,000 | 18,000 | 20,000 |
| Tape Editor | 30,000 | 21,000 | 15,000 | 10,000 | 12,000 |
| Graphics Specialist | 30,000 | 20,000 | 18,000 | 28,000 | 22,000 |
| Internet Specialist | 32,500 | 21,000 | 26,000 | 16,000 | 27,300 |

Generally, the larger the news staff, the larger the salary. There are more and more exceptions to that, however, as we see a growth in small news departments at independents in large and major markets.

Percentage of TV News Employees Under Contract ... by Position

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| News Director | 29% |
| Assistant News Director | 27 |
| Executive Producer | 42 |
| Managing Editor | 27 |
| Assignment Editor | 23 |

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| News Producer | 40 |
| News Anchor | 75 |
| Weathercaster | 66 |
| Sports Anchor | 64 |
| News Reporter | 53 |
| News Writer | 11 |
| News Assistant | 2 |
| Sports Reporter | 38 |
| Photographer | 11 |
| Tape Editor | 3 |
| Graphics Specialist | 9 |
| Internet Specialist | 15 |

Radio News Salaries

| | Average | Median | Minimum | Maximum |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| News Director | \$26,700 | \$25,000 | \$12,000 | \$70,000 |
| News Anchor | 24,000 | 23,000 | 10,000 | 55,000 |
| News Reporter | 24,500 | 24,000 | 16,000 | 38,000 |
| Sports Anchor | 28,800 | 24,000 | 23,000 | 40,000 |
| News Producer | 24,200 | 26,000 | 10,000 | 38,000 |

Overall, radio salaries were up 3.2 percent over a year earlier (an improvement on last year's increase of 2.2 percent). With inflation running a low 1.6 percent for the year, that means a gain in real wages of 1.6 percent. Last year, news directors had the biggest gains; this year, reporters grew the most as news director salaries stagnated. The median (midpoint) salary is probably the best gauge of what people typically make.

Median Radio News Salaries by Market Size

| | Major | Large | Medium | Small |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| News Director | \$40,000 | \$28,000 | \$24,500 | \$18,500 |
| News Anchor | 30,500 | 22,500 | 23,500 | 19,000 |
| News Reporter | 32,000 | 26,000 | 24,000 | 18,000 |
| News Producer | 23,500 | 24,000 | 26,000 | NA |
| Sports Anchor | NA | 36,500 | 23,500 | 24,000 |

As always, salaries tend to be highest in the largest markets.

Median Radio News Salaries by Staff Size

| | 3 or more | 2 | 1 |
|---------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| News Director | \$35,000 | \$28,000 | \$21,000 |
| News Anchor | 24,500 | 22,000 | 17,000 |
| News Reporter | 24,000 | 20,000 | NA |
| News Producer | 26,000 | NA | NA |
| Sports Anchor | \$24,000 | NA | NA |

Typically, salaries are highest in the largest news departments.

Median Radio News Salaries by Number of Stations Supervised

| | 3 or more stations | 2 | 1 |
|---------------|--------------------|----------|----------|
| News Director | \$24,500 | \$20,000 | \$28,000 |
| News Anchor | 24,000 | 22,000 | 23,000 |

| | | | |
|---------------|--------|--------|--------|
| News Reporter | 25,000 | 18,000 | 24,000 |
| News Producer | 30,000 | NA | 11,500 |
| Sports Anchor | 23,500 | 32,000 | NA |

With increasing consolidation, we took a look at whether the increase in responsibility and work load that commonly results has meant an increase in salary. There is no evidence to support that. Clearly, market size and size of staff are far greater determinants of salary than the number of stations overseen.

About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 1998 among all 1,422 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 994 radio stations.

Valid responses came from 793 television stations (55.8 percent) and 188 radio news directors representing 426 radio stations.