

MEDIA SAVVY

By Sam McManis

This just in ...

Taping, editing, anchoring:
These campus newscasters
are state of the TV art

As deadline looms, a story for the morning newscast has yet to be edited. It's still mostly a jumble of interviews, B-roll of track-team members doing push-ups, and stand-up footage of sports anchor Kristen Miller.

But by 9:35 a.m., when the bell sounds at the end of second period at Christian Brothers High School, that track "package" had better be ready. Otherwise, there will be a 1 minute, 48 second gap to fill on the KBFT newscast, beamed by closed-circuit TV into every classroom.

And you thought the SATs were pressure-packed.

So with nary a half-hour to spare, student producers Trevor Rappleye and Valentino Rodriguez Jr., along with Miller, hunch over

an editing machine. They are laser-like focused on the task, which is not unlike completing a jigsaw puzzle.

Sensing perhaps that assistance is needed, program director Brendan Hogan (who goes by the title "teacher") wanders over and watches as Rappleye lays down a sound over the B-roll (a.k.a. random shots of subjects). Miller, on the tape, asks the runner, "How do you expect to finish our season?" And when the boy answers, "At the end of this year, I expect to be No. 1 in the nation," we see him on the screen doing push-ups.

"Play that again, Trevor," Hogan says

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Ah, school days.

Of course, student journalists have be-

► SAVVY, Page E2



Students Zack Hill, left, and Kelly Harris operate the cameras and teleprompters at the KBFT studio. The control room is as large as those at some professional stations.



Christian Brothers High School students Heather Kennedy, left, Chris DuCray and Kristen Miller are anchors for the morning TV newscast shown in classroom Sacramento Bee / F...

► FROM PAGE E1

around since, well, there have been students. Or journalists.

But the era of the weekly – or monthly or, OK, whenever they can get it out – high school newspaper is starting to give way in this technological age to broadcast journalism.

Three mornings a week, for instance, the broadcast-journalism class at Christian Brothers produces a 13-minute newscast about the happenings at the private Catholic high school. Occasionally, they'll touch on stories beyond the quad.

Franklin High in Elk Grove, Center High in Antelope, and Folsom High and Oak Ridge High in El Dorado Hills also produce shows.

There's even a regional competition honoring student news, advertisements and documentary work, sponsored by the Sacramento Educational Cable Consortium; this year, it will take place on Thursday. And if the past is any indication, Christian Brothers figures to have a big night at the awards banquet.

KBFT (the call letters stand for "Brothers Falcon Television") is the defending champ in the best newscast category.

(In a separate, national competition against 700 high schools, Christian Brothers was also rated the top news show in 2003 and 2005, finishing second in 2004. This fall, KBFT earned honorable mention.)

"The entries to our contest keep getting better and better, especially in technical quality," says Doug Niva, SECC production manager and head of the regional contest. "There are a lot of students doing good work. What Christian Brothers does is get the content, too."

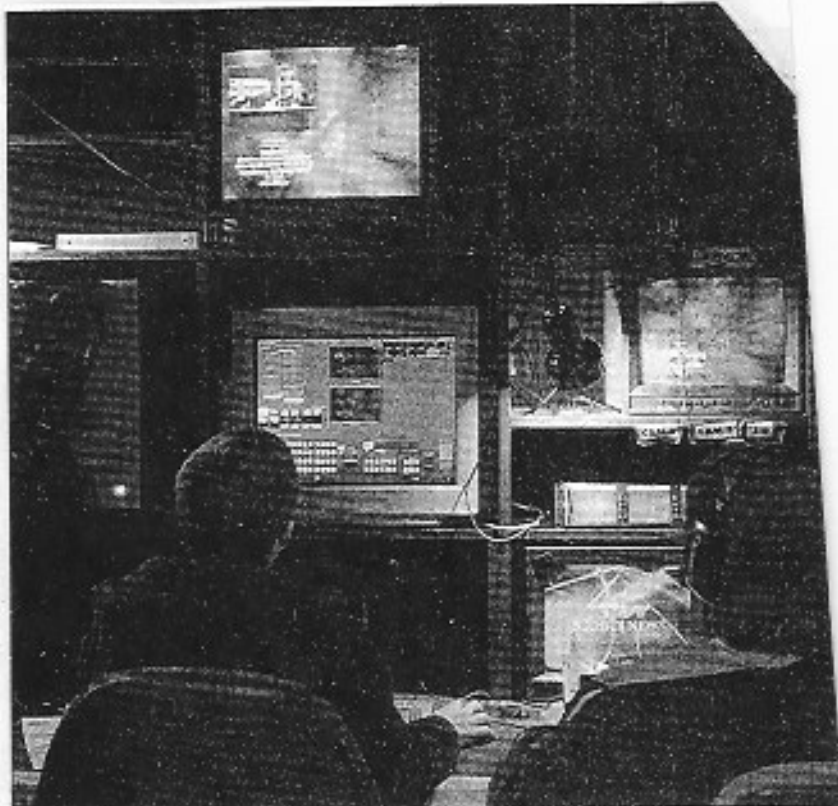
In KBFT's studio, which also doubles as the classroom, plaques and certificates line the walls.

"These kids work hard," Hogan says. "This is like their football team. The difference between this and football is that our kids get a grade."

The broadcasting class, akin to the "varsity," has 27 students. Many work weekends and after school shooting video, working on the set and producing public service announcements for school clubs. Two weeks ago, seniors Heather Kennedy and Chris DuCray took it off campus, traveling to San Diego for the state Democratic Convention to report on issues important to teenagers.

And just as a football team needs proper equipment, KBFT uses state-of-the-art supplies.

Thirteen editing machines are housed in two suites located diagonal to the news set, which features a three-person



anchor desk with a bank of monitors behind the "talent" and a giant plasma screen TV for introducing taped reports. Three cameras are mounted to the floor, and there are teleprompters for each anchor. The control room is as large as some local professional news stations.

Such an ambitious undertaking takes considerable money and vision.

The money comes from school coffers (tuition is about \$10,000 a year) and donations. And the vision came from Brother Roch Dufresne, who began the program in October 2002. Campus lore goes that Brother Roch started with five students and a couple of cameras and built it from there.

When he left to work as communication director for the international Christian Brothers organization in Rome, the school didn't have to look far for a replacement. Hogan is a Christian Brothers graduate (1995), with a degree in new media studies.

"A lot of the kids come in here already knowing a lot about technology," Hogan says. "But they also need to learn about broadcast media."

Scrawled on the giant white storyboard at the center of the studio is a package about parking-pass abuse on campus.

Students are apparently parking in the school lot without permits, forcing those with permits to park on the street. School officials are supposed to ticket all violators, but KBFT reporter J.D.

Nairn has found anecdotal evidence that this is not happening.

But the story, on this day, isn't happening, either.

Nairn and Hogan sit at an editing table, hashing it out.

Hogan: "You need to find someone sneaking in without a parking pass."

Nairn: "I can find people who can park in the lot because it's too crowded – like, seniors who have permits."

Hogan: "Fine, but you also need people sneaking in. Then you go to (school officials) and ask, 'What's the policy for people parking illegally?' When they say, 'We give them tickets then you ask, 'How come all these people aren't being ticketed?' That's important, J.D."

Nairn nods, then clicks on footage of rows of cars in a lot without permits. Then he shows Hogan a stand-up he recorded in the lot.

"That's nice," Hogan says, "but not enough."

Nairn grabs a tripod, a video camera and hits the reporting trail.

Like prep sports stars who someday dream of turning pro, some students who work at KBFT want to make broadcast journalism a vocation.

Because the program is only five years old, they have yet to see their first college graduate enter the business. But Hogan is hopeful.

Students Kennedy and DuCray – and their producer, Colin Lygren, all senior – have caught the TV bug and want to

handle all the details



Courtesy of Christian Brothers High School

Above, KBFT reporter Heather Kennedy interviews Kent Smith, a Democratic delegate from San Diego County, at the state Democratic Convention. Chris DuCray is behind the camera.

Christian Brothers High School students Martin Miles, left, and Andrew Nelson operate equipment in the control room.

Sacramento Bee/ Florence Low

be seen on TV screens, or work behind the scenes, beyond the Christian Brothers campus.

Lygren, who won a national award for stand-up work in 2006, is a self-described news junkie who watches local newscasts three times a day and never misses an installment of "Dateline NBC."

"I want to do what (video journalist Dan Adams) does at News10 - report and shoot," Lygren says. "The ultimate goal for me is 'Dateline.' I absolutely love everything they do. Chris Hansen (the "To Catch a Predator" anchor) is my hero."

For DuCray, a KBFT executive producer who occasionally anchors the news with Kennedy, it's all about "the whole technical aspect," he says. "I'm not a writer at all. I'm into editing."

Which is not to say when called upon, DuCray can't report with the best of them. Driving home to River Park from school one mid-March day with his mother, DuCray saw smoke from the train trestle fire near Cal Expo. So he enlisted his mom to hold the tripod and camera in place while he did a stand-up. Then he shot scenes from the fire. The next day, he edited and added a voice-over, and Hogan put it on the air.

As for Kennedy, she says it was her parents who first signed her up for video production.

"They thought I'd like it," she says. "And I do. I'm planning on making (broadcast journalism) my major. It's

being live. It's stressful but exciting."

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Six minutes to airtime, somebody is fooling around with a superball in the studio. It careens toward Hogan, who snatches it.

With a sly smile, Hogan starts bouncing the ball himself.

"Get in the room and stop horsing around," Hogan says with mock authority. "We've got six minutes. Light the set."

With that, Kennedy and DuCray take their positions at the anchor desk, flanked on the left by sports anchor Miller.

DuCray has changed from a T-shirt to a coat and tie. Kennedy, who sits on a box on her chair to appear taller, has changed into a nice blouse.

The lights above the desk shine harshly on DuCray. That catches Hogan's attention.

"You're kind of glowing there, Chris," he says, then calls out to the control room to fix it.

"There are so many minor details that can go wrong and end up being catastrophic for a newscast," Hogan says.

But there are no catastrophes on this day. A minute after the bell rings ("We always give the teachers a minute to turn on the TVs," Hogan says), Chris and Heather - Christian Brothers' Dave and Lois - are on the air.

Top story: The student body elections, accompanied by detailed graphics profiling each candidate.

Then comes a rundown of "club news," followed by an "ad" for the senior video now on sale. Back live, the anchors flow into a segment on college opportunities before breaking for another "ad," this time publicizing the school's "Open Mike Night."

And then, the anchors "toss" to Miller for the sports. But in introducing a package on the golf team, it's obvious that her microphone is malfunctioning. Once they switch to video, Hogan runs out of the control room and instructs Miller to use DuCray's mike when they return live.

Problem solved - Miller introduces her package on the track team. It airs without a hitch, and after Kennedy signs off (remember, DuCray has lost use of his mike), the set goes dark.

"Nice job, everybody," Hogan shouts.

"This was one of our best."

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Media Savvy by The Bee's Sam McManis runs Tuesdays in Scene. He can be reached at (916) 321-1145 or smcmanis@sacbee.com. For more on local media, read McManis'