"The change of pace in the past five years has made the job more demanding, but it also adds excitement. Everything is fast-paced and immediate now."

—Sheila Halloran Skowyra ’03
WITH MULTIPLE PHONE LINES RINGING, POLICE SCANNERS CRACKLING and reporters checking in at any moment, Skowyra must make split-second decisions about where in greater Boston to send reporters, camera crews and “live” trucks to cover breaking news. An assignment editor at WCVB Channel 5 since 2004, she works off-camera at the speed of light at the station’s news desk, called by some the ‘heartbeat’ of the news organization.

“All the information flows through here,” Skowyra said. “I work with another assignment editor and we have a good team. We do a lot of quick decision making, which includes tons of logistical decisions, as we move crews around. There’s a lot going on here all the time.”

“So much has changed in such a short time. Today, people are going to different sources for their news.” –Sheila Halloran Skowyra ’03

In many and unexpected ways Skowyra’s undergraduate years prepared her well for the controlled chaos of working a broadcast news assignment desk.

“I always felt like I was doing a million things at Assumption,” she said. “I changed my major after two years and took lots of different classes, plus I worked on The Provoc, so I was pulled in many different directions at once. Working long hours and juggling a lot was good preparation for my job today.”

Skowyra has experienced dramatic changes in the way broadcast news is gathered, packaged and reported since she joined the assignment desk team at Channel 5 five years ago.

“So much has changed in such a short time,” she said. “Today, people are going to different sources for their news and to different media, like Facebook and Twitter, for breaking news. Most people aren’t waiting until 5 p.m. to turn on their TVs to see the news. There’s a lot more immediacy with breaking news. People want to know right away what’s going on.”

Also gone are the days when reporters and camera crews would bring breaking news back to the station to be edited for the evening news broadcast.

“When it’s breaking news, we need to get a crew to the scene immediately in a live truck,” Skowyra said. “They need to get the video back to us right away to get it on air and on the Web site. It’s not like it was even five years ago. Everybody is doing more. It used to be that reporters went out with one story to cover. Now they have two or three assignments in a day. It’s challenging, but that also makes it exciting.”

Skowyra, who grew up in Quincy, would not have predicted as an Assumption freshman that one day she would be employed at ground zero in the newsroom of WCVB-TV.