

Campus station seeks FM transmitter

Brian Conroy is mad. It's not easy being in charge of a radio station that's just barely on the air. Yet that is the reality that Conroy and the 17 other disk jockeys at Capitol Campus' WNDR face every day.

The station operates on a "carrier current" system. That means it can only be heard in the Olmsted Building, the dormitories and Meade Heights. Well, part of Meade Heights. And the dorm transmitter has been out of service most of the semester, explains Conroy, WNDR's program director.

"We need to go FM," Conroy says matter-of-factly. Acquiring an FM transmitter has been a dream of several recent program directors.

This semester, the picture brightened for a time as the campus administration expressed interest in moving to the FM

band. According to Don Strausburger, creative consultant and former program director, both the Humanities Division and Student Affairs Office were involved in discussions on that possibility. A prohibitive cost suspended consideration, said James South, Assistant Provost for Student Affairs.

According to Strausburger, going FM without stereo would cost \$9500. That would buy a 150 watt transmitter with a range of 20 miles. Adding stereo would cost an additional \$15 thousand to \$20 thousand, he said.

Moving to the FM band would mean that commuter students and the community at large would be exposed to Penn State Capitol on a regular basis, according to Angelo Vecchio, the station's business manager.

Vecchio was in charge of the Wilkes-Barre Campus' WPSU before it was closed by the university. The studio equipment from that station, Vecchio said, is now in Capitol's third floor Humanities production studio.

The transmitter, however, could not be used here because of a recent Federal Communications Commission (FCC) policy change barring the licensing of any new 10-watt FM stations, according to John McVeigh, an FCC spokesman. The transmitter was a 10-watt unit.

McVeigh said that Capitol's radio station, which is currently non-existent so far as the FCC is concerned, could apply for a non-commercial FM license with at least 100 watts, a commercial FM license with the same requirements, or an AM commercial license. He said a "spectrum search" would have to be performed to find a clear frequency in this area.

McVeigh also noted a recent change in FCC regulations that allows stations to operate without a full time engineer.

As yet, no decision has been made on improving the transmission system, according

to Strausburger. In the interim, the station has submitted a request for a 100-watt carrier current transmitter to add to the three now in use. Program director Conroy called the carrier current unit "the most cost-effective way" to expand coverage, although he said it is far inferior to an FM station. Under the carrier current system, the signal will still be limited to certain parts of the campus, Strausburger noted.

"We take our performance seriously," said Vecchio, "We have pride in what we sound like. Sometimes it's a fight with the equipment in there."

Does Vecchio feel happy with the carrier current system?

"If you tell (record companies) you're AM carrier current," he replies, "they feel it's not even worth the postage to send you their records."

Most radio stations receive promotional copies of records from record companies interested in getting their product heard over the airwaves. Vecchio has been contacting record companies to acquire such a service for WNDR but has met with mixed results, primarily because of the station's size and broadcast quality.

Compensating for this are

the recent steps that the station has taken to make the programming sound professional. A "format" or rotation of current music has been in use this semester, and the recent acquisition of Westwood One programming like the "Dr. Demento Show" and "Off the Record" have brought the sound of the station closer to that of a commercial FM station.

Further complicating the station's image problem is the pending move of the station to W-343, which Strausburger estimates will occur during the semester break.

"By moving upstairs," he says, "the station will no longer be as visible to the average student. The move will, however, technically help the station in terms of expansion and accessibility to production facilities."

South says the move would facilitate any future movement toward an FM station, because of the increased access to the roof from the third floor.

Such improvements, however, apparently are not ones that either Conroy or Vecchio or Strausburger will have the opportunity to see before they graduate.

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