



Community radio gets no respect

In 1990, the University of Windsor student government fired the entire staff of CJAM radio. "They [the council] didn't understand the business of radio and they looked at the whole thing in a vacuum," Gelineau says.

And in 1989, the University of British Columbia Student Society took over CTR FM and turned it into a "Bruce Springsteen and sports station."

"We [community stations] are very different from commercial stations, and we need protection from student governments who don't realize this," Gelineau adds.

Stuck in the basement

Gelineau should know. She is also station manager of CKUT FM at McGill, which is currently facing a threat of its own: the McGill student union wants to charge the station more than \$16,000 per year rent for their offices in the basement of the student union building.

Student union representatives say they want to pay off their debts by collecting revenues from the independent student groups using their building (aside from CKUT, a legal aid clinic and a student newspaper will be charged similar rents. Another student paper, owned by the student union, will be exempt from rent).

Gelineau acknowledges that this isn't as threatening as the crises faced at Ryerson or New Brunswick, but she says it shows a similar disrespect for community radio.

"I don't think they have a problem with our programming. But they're labelling us an autonomous student group and looking at the autonomous part instead of the student part. We are a radio station that is a part of McGill as much as any other part."

CKUT plans to move into another building as soon as they can save enough money and negotiate a lease, Gelineau says. Aside from the high rent and the inconvenient location, the station is also limited because the building isn't open 24 hours a day.

But Gelineau says CKUT may be stuck in the basement for longer than they'd like because of the lack of funding sources available. Although the station has a tuition levy and collected a healthy \$58,577 in listener

donations this year, CKUT may have trouble moving unless they can get their rent waived this year.

Outside of student fees, listener donations and a tiny supply of advertising, community stations have almost no avenues for funding. They are not eligible for most of the government and foundation grants other community organizations receive.

Gelineau says the NCRA wants the CRTC to grant charitable status to community stations. "We asked if they could recognize the charitable nature of the business we're involved with, but they say they'll have to spend more time looking at that."

This typifies the love-hate relationship that exists between community stations and the CRTC.

On one hand, the CRTC is the branch of government which regulates the music stations play, tells them what words they can't say or the air, forces them to live up to promises of performance and generally creates a labyrinth of bewildering bureaucracy.

On the other hand, it was the CRTC that created campus FM radio in the first place, as a grassroots media opposed to the patterns of commercial radio. In its rulings and policies, the CRTC has consistently fought to keep the stations independent and distinctive.

This year the CRTC promises to update its policies for campus and community radio — policies which were created in the 1970s, when everyone thought campus stations would be staffed mainly by students.

The changes will create a whole new category for CRTC regulation — the "campus/community" station — which is legally required "to provide alternative programming such as music not generally heard on commercial stations or the CBC..., in-depth spoken word programming, and programming addressed to specialized groups within the community."

This will give stations like KCLN a weapon to use against mainstream-minded student politicians. It won't keep them from cutting off the funds, though.

The only thing which will do that, Marva Jackson says, is government funding of community radio.

"We provide a service in the community that cannot be replaced, so I think it's about time the government stepped in and helped campus and community radio."

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