



The community beat at home: Downsview community radio CHRY (105.5 FM) live from Vanier college. 24 hours per day.

“Too much minority programming”

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Ryerson referendum is one example of the backlash coming from intolerant student governments across the country.

In 1975, University of Ottawa station CKCU was awarded an FM broadcast license from the CRTC (the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the federal body which licenses and regulates all broadcast media). It was the first of its kind in Canada.

During the 1980s, 26 other stations won FM licences and community radio became a huge phenomenon — one which took even the CRTC by surprise. For although the stations were based on campuses, their FM signals were reaching deep into Canada's urban communities and attracting an ever-expanding subculture of broadcast devotees.

Most stations became voices for the voiceless as African, Caribbean, Asian, Latino and Native communities jammed with lesbian and gay groups, anti-poverty activists, feminists, anarchists and students in cramped campus basement studios.

This created, as Jackson says, “some major contradictions.” People were emerging from the margins to gain real media power, at least on the local level —

but they were getting their space and much of their funding from the university, still an enclave of White middle-class culture.

Conflicts were bound to erupt.

And when they do, they usually come from student governments. In a 1989 report, a station manager described the relationship between campus radio and student government as “persistent low-intensity warfare.”

Student politicians, disturbed by the horde of ‘outsiders’ in the studio, want more influence over the station. Sometimes it's by threatening to cut off direct funds, or holding a referendum over a tuition levy, or by trying to stack the station's board of directors with student politicians.

Their message very often carries racist overtones — “too much minority programming” is a popular refrain, or “not enough of what we listen to.”

Student interests

Steve Staples knows these phrases well. The full-time program manager at University of New Brunswick's CHSR, he has just had his job eliminated after the student union voted to withhold \$27,000 of the station's \$79,000 budget.

CHSR is directly funded from the student union budget, rather than through a tuition fee levy like CKLN's. Staples says that during the station's 11-year history it has “almost always” had trouble getting its budget accepted by the UNB student union.

“But this year has been particularly brutal, particularly nasty,” he adds. Aside from cutting the funds, the student union is demanding a majority of student councillors on the station's 11-seat board of directors, which is currently represented by a wide range of the community.

It's all part of an attack on the station's alternative programming, Staples says.

“We have a number of cultural shows and shows on human rights and women's issues, for example. It's very difficult for [student politicians] to come out directly against these, but they do call us ‘minority-oriented’ and tell us we're only serving the interests of a minority.”

“Their old line is we're not representing the students because we're not playing what students want,” he adds. “They used to say that. Now they veil it in terms like ‘we're not serving students' interests.’”

Staples says the station has little chance of overturning the student union decision this year. “The best we can do is drag out a whole bunch of our members to their meeting and try to persuade them the other way through the sheer numbers of people staring at them,” he says.

Like Jackson, Staples sees his station's horde of supporters as a reason for optimism. CHSR has asked the UNB administration for a direct tuition levy, and Staples says the odds look promising since the university president is a CHSR supporter.

Nadine Gelineau, president of the National Community Radio Association, says CHSR's case is by no means

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