



Photo by Don Smith

Jerry Wiese, Cindy Silcox and Stacy Waldman, on duty at WPSC, the radio station at William Paterson College.

Radio war pits college against high school for FM frequency

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This is a story about a radio war — one that pits two stations against each other for the same FM frequency.

In one corner sits WPSC, William Paterson College's 17-year-old campus AM station. It is squaring off against WRRH-FM, a 10-watt station run for 20 years by Ramapo-Indian Hills High School students from an Oakland studio and Franklin Lakes transmitter.

The two stations are fighting for WRRH's 88.7 frequency, and the Federal Communications Commission will declare a winner sometime next year.

Both contestants are classified as noncommercial educational stations, and the contest was sparked by a recent FCC rules change eliminating five-year license protection to such stations with less than 100 watts of power. The commission reasoned that weaker stations don't best serve the public interest, said WPSC attorney Mark Fields.

In March, the college station, which is funded by student activity fees, filed a license application seeking to replace the high school station with a 200-watt stereo FM station that would be heard within a 35-mile radius of Wayne.

WPSC only transmits a local monaural signal through campus electrical wiring, and feeds its mix of "alternative" rock and jazz music to UA-Columbia Cablevision via telephone lines.

Meanwhile, the high school countered in October by filing to upgrade its signal output to 100 watts. An FCC

spokeswoman in Washington, D.C., said the WPSC application has been fully reviewed but the commission may take nearly a year to evaluate WRRH's request and schedule a hearing.

"You have to look in terms of who will fulfill the needs of the community better," said Chris Gradone, the college station's chief engineer.

"We feel we have strong community programming, and will be able to fulfill those needs better," said Gradone, a junior communications major from Bloomfield. "They (WRRH) weren't even into upgrading their power until we filed for their frequency." But WRRH faculty sponsor Bud Van Genderen sees the situation differently.

"We've had the frequency for 20 years, and been very happy with our 10-watt status," said Van Genderen, a communications teacher.

"We have very strong educational programming, and to disrupt it at the whim of a college station which already has an AM station is a duplication of their own status — and would blow us out of the water."

Van Genderen said the approximately 60 students who work at the station preparing public service announcements, educational, rock music and tape-delayed sports broadcasts have "really geared up" for obtaining a more powerful signal.

Now, he said, the station is only heard in Oakland, Franklin Lakes and Wyckoff, the communities comprising the school district.

Students are willing to raise part of the \$10,000 necessary to boost their signal, the teacher continued. Last summer the

school board agreed to pay the rest, he said.

At William Paterson, the station has convinced the student cooperative association to kick in \$30,000 above its annual \$20,000 operating budget to erect a transmitter in Pompton Lakes, said production director Jerry Wiese.

Gradone added that the station has spent close to \$3,000 on engineer and legal fees since its last FM license application in 1978. That application, which encountered engineering problems and a challenge from a Newark public station protecting its signal, died in 1981.

WPSC staffers argue that theirs is one of the few state colleges without an over-the-air broadcast outlet. Also, they contend their schedule — they broadcast 18 hours a day, 365 days a year — is preferable to WRRH's 38 hours per week, which barely exceeds the FCC minimum.

Wiese said about 80 WPC students participate in WPSC programming.

Van Genderen said he's willing to share the frequency with the college on evenings and weekends, but claimed station general manager Wayne Neumann never returned his calls last summer.

Neumann was unavailable for comment yesterday, but former WPSC general manager Steve Dubin of Fair Lawn said Van Genderen balked at the expense involved during discussions about time sharing last year.

For the outcome of this monumental struggle radio addicts will have to tune in next year, same time — but maybe not the same channel.