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[« What doors did education open for you? | Main Index | Archives | Alter Ego »](#)
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Real College Radio

KUOM celebrates 100 years of putting the r-a-d in radio



From farm reports and football games broadcast in Morse code to education for homebound kids during the polio epidemic; from Garrison Keillor's radio roots to being one of the reasons *Rolling Stone* magazine thinks the U of M rocks... Radio K (KUOM), the award-winning student-run radio station of the University of Minnesota has covered a lot of (widely varied) ground in its 100-year history.

Radio broadcasting at the University of Minnesota began as an experiment in 1912 (and although transmissions were officially suspended during WWI, football games were broadcast in Morse code in 1915). By 1920, programming had resumed, and on January 13, 1922, the U received the first official radio broadcasting license issued for the state of Minnesota (AM 770, call sign WLB; changed to KUOM in 1945). As of today, the station is the 10th oldest still on the air, beating out WHA at the University of Wisconsin Madison by a few hours, and makes Radio K the oldest licensed non-commercial broadcast station in the country.

Initially, programming featured agricultural and weather reports, along with lectures, concerts, and football games. In the 1930s, however, the station began adding distance

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[cce times \(24\)](#)

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[February 2012 \(8\)](#)
[January 2012 \(1\)](#)
[December 2011 \(1\)](#)
[November 2011 \(11\)](#)
[October 2011 \(4\)](#)
[May 2011 \(8\)](#)
[February 2011 \(4\)](#)
[November 2010 \(5\)](#)
[October 2010 \(8\)](#)
[July 2010 \(7\)](#)
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education to its repertoire--including the historic "Minnesota School of the Air."

When a polio epidemic closed schools (and even the State Fair!) in 1946, KUOM worked with teachers to design the School of the Air, which would go on to serve as a substitute for the closed educational facilities. Minnesota School of the Air continued into the 1980s, offering supplementary programming for in-school listening by elementary students.

In 1948, a second station emerged on the University campus--this one an entirely student-run organization (KUOM had paid staff members). Run by volunteers, WMMR AM 730 programming included daily news and sport reports, campus event promotions, live play-by-play for basketball, football, and hockey, promotion of other campus events, and live music broadcasts. It switched to a music format in the 1960s, while still broadcasting the news.

By the end of the 1980s, WMMR's listenership had dropped "into the single digits." And, according to University officials, "most of the educational value of KUOM had been superseded by other media outlets," necessitating a switch to a music-dominated format. The result was a merger of the two in 1993--the official birth of Radio K (KUOM AM 770).


The "new" Radio K brought together a small, full-time staff working in conjunction with student employees who provided much of the on-air talent. Programming ran the gamut from ska, punk, funk, and indie rock, to news, current events, and sports coverage.

Today, the station continues its format of playing eclectic, independent music--both classic and new. It receives about 120 new recordings each month which are filtered through a large group of reviewers and disc jockeys. Recordings that pass muster are added to a large playlist that is constantly updated, and on-air DJs use the list for about 60 percent of the music played while choosing the rest on their own.

For most of its history, Radio K was available on 770 AM during daylight hours only (it shuts off at sundown, in order to protect stations in New Mexico and New York), and shared a weak FM signal with a St. Louis Park high school, broadcasting on 106.5 after school hours, on the weekends, and in the summer. However, in 2005, after extensive FCC reconfigurations, it began broadcasting on 100.7 and 1004.5 FM, allowing its programming to be heard all over the Twin Cities metro region, 24/7. The station also has an online stream--allowing fans from all over the world to tune in.

The technology has changed, and program content has varied, but throughout its history, Radio K has played a key


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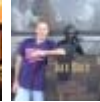
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role in the University community--and the outside community as a whole.

Concludes Sara Miller, station manager at Radio K, "College radio has played a unique role in both the general media landscape and within the University community. No other media (e.g. newspapers, TV broadcasts) is as widely accessed by members outside the University communities as college radio, creating a window into academic life for those in the general public. And, at the same time, college radio is created by and for students and is relevant and accessible to both the student body and audiences across the globe.

"There will always be demand for curators of culture and sources of news. The world needs arts and cultural reporting, news reporting, curators of style (tastemakers), and portals to access this information to educate and inspire. College radio--Radio K--is in a unique position to be at the forefront of the changing media landscape. The people who lead college radio stations are at the forefront of the technology revolution, so we are in the best position to move forward and create a new media model for the next generation."

Want to learn more about the history of college radio at the U? Check out the timeline below, which features all sorts of juicy tidbits, photos, and factoids from KUOM's illustrious history. (An interactive version of this timeline is also available on the [Radio K's website](#))

Real College Radio: The History

1912

Radio transmissions at the University date to 1912, when a professor named F.W. Springer began experimenting with broadcasts, though he probably just used a spark gap transmitter. Activities were suspended by World War I, but electrical engineering professor C.M. Jansky, Jr. was broadcasting again by 1920.

1915

The first U of M football games are broadcast in Morse code.

1920

The University of Minnesota receives license for experimental radio station 9XI. Radiotelephone broadcasts began that fall with agricultural market reports, weather forecasts, and concerts among the regularly scheduled programs. Initial broadcasts originated in the electrical engineering building on the Minneapolis campus, where a

transmitter was mounted on the roof.



1922

The University received the first radio broadcasting license in the state of Minnesota on January 13, 1922, for the call sign WLB. The station is the 10th oldest station still on the air, beating out WHA at the University of Wisconsin Madison by a few hours. That also makes Radio K the oldest licensed non-commercial broadcast station in the country.

1930s-40s

In the 1930s and 1940s, the station broadcast a considerable amount of educational material and was used for distance learning -- a practice that continued into the 1990s.



1936

Studios and facilities were moved from the electrical engineering building to Eddy Hall.

1945

The station call letters are changed from WLB to KUOM.



1946

A polio epidemic in 1946 that resulted in temporary school closings and the cancellation of the Minnesota State Fair led the station to create programming for children who were homebound. Minnesota School of the Air, as it was called, designed with the aid of teachers, substituted for the closed schools. Minnesota School of the Air continued into the 1980s, offering supplementary programming for in-school listening by elementary students. Those programs, along with

others broadcast in the 1940s, were recognized for their importance and led to several awards being given to the station.



1948

Another station, WMMR (which would later merge with KUOM to form Radio K), was created on campus in 1948, with studios in Coffman Memorial Union. Focused on providing a service for the student body, it originally broadcast via carrier current on campus, using the frequency 730 AM (hence the oft-used tag-line "Radio 73") This was an entirely student-run operation, relying on volunteers. The station reaches five dormitories on the U campus.

1955

WMMR begins to sell commercial air time. The going rate: \$4.50 a minute.

1959

WMMR's dormitory listenership reaches 48%

1960s

By the mid-'60s through the end of its life, WMMR tried to emulate the management structure of a typical AM rocker of the day, with an appointed general manager, program director, music director, and other management positions. The volunteers managed to put out programming for nearly 18 hours a day most days of the school year. A news and sports operation broadcast daily reports, and the basketball, football, and hockey programs were usually broadcast with live play-by-play. A number of live broadcasts from the Whole Music Club and the Great Hall at the union also took place, and the station served to promote other campus events such as the "Campus Carny" held annually in the old field house. Garrison Keillor, the well-known host of Minnesota Public Radio's "A Prairie Home Companion," began his radio career broadcasting classical music on WMMR as a student in the early 1960s. He then worked at KUOM from 1963 to 1968.

1962

WMMR adopts format of half classical music and half rock music

KUOM Program Guide from 1962



1968

In January 1968, WMMR is ordered shut down by the University's Board of Governors due to financial reasons. However late that summer, with the help of University President Malcolm Moos, the station returns to the air. Rock music dominates the format. Soon after returning to the air, WMMR also covers that year's presidential elections as part of an eight-station organization, which included live coverage of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.



1969

KUOM introduces a whole series of programs by, for and about disadvantaged groups including "On the Black Side," "Echoes en Español," "Indian News," and "Equal Voice: A Women's Forum." These programs lasted until 1984.



1970

WMMR becomes an important national news source on

campus strikes and protests during the Vietnam War.



1973

KUOM begins "Scope," the first hour-long noncommercial news program on Twin Cities radio.

"Scope "continues until 1985 when the format changes.



Also in 1973, KUOM began broadcast classes for credit in cooperation with the U of M's Department of Independent Study. Early programs were simply lectures taped in the classroom. Later programs were specially produced for radio and, beginning in 1985, included a call-in component. The program lasted until 1991.

1974

The KUOM studios were moved again, this time to the sixth floor of the Rarig Center just across the Mississippi River on the West Bank.



1981

WMMR is programmed as a Top 40 station. Listenership is on the rise. The students in charge go on to run commercial Top 40 station WLOL.

1984

WMMR format is changed to College/Alternative.

Listenership plummets.



KUOM adopts call-in format to make use of the expertise of University faculty. Each program has a subject matter expert or two, usually at least one a University professor. Topics areas included current events, political and social issues, the arts, and practical topics such as gardening, home maintenance, etc. The format change was made at the direction of the University administration, which ordered KUOM to "stop duplicating" programming heard on other Twin Cities' noncommercial stations, notably Minnesota Public Radio. This style of program continues until 1993.



1988

Technical problems, including the main audio board catching fire, knock WMMR off the air. All problems are eventually fixed, but listenership drops to single digits.



1991

For nearly 70 years, WLB and later KUOM time-shared the already daytime-restricted 770 kHz frequency with WCAL of St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, so each station averaged just about six hours of programming each day. The University of Minnesota eventually made an agreement with St. Olaf where WCAL would get land for a powerful FM transmitter on U of M property near Rosemount, Minnesota, in exchange for the shutdown of WCAL's AM transmitter so that KUOM could transmit exclusively on the frequency during the day. The agreement came to fruition in 1991.

1993

Radio K is born. In the early 1990s, after a great deal of lobbying by WMMR General Manager Jim Musil -- who also designed the purple Radio K logo of the time-- the University began to examine the idea of merging WMMR and KUOM.

The University explained the transition to a music format by saying that most of the educational value of KUOM had been superseded by other media outlets by this time.



The transition finally took place in 1993, and the station started broadcasting as "Radio K" on October 1 that year. The first song ever played on Radio K was "Do You Remember Rock n Roll Radio?" by The Ramones. To avoid the lack of direction found at some college music stations, the new "Radio K" had a small full-time staff to oversee operations and provide a certain level of continuity, while students would provide much of the on-air talent while going through their radio studies. It is a training ground for students, programming alternative rock and other materials of interest to a student-age audience. The station is given a three-year trial period to prove itself.

1994

Radio K's website, RadioK.org, launches

1996

A Review Committee established by the dean of Continuing Education and Extension recommends Radio K be continued indefinitely and the University continue to provide financial support for the station.

1997

K launches its innovative BuyaWatt program to generate listener financial support. The station also begins streaming its programming on the Internet using RealAudio technology.

1998

In April, Radio K conducts its first PowerSurge on-air listener fundraiser.

2005

In the summer, translator station W264BR begins re-broadcasting KUOM-FM and KDXL-FM from the KUOM-AM tower in Falcon Heights.

The August 2005 *Rolling Stone* issue features an article on "Schools that Rock" naming Radio K the reason that the

University of Minnesota rocks.



2007

Radio K changes its trademark purple logo to a new, modern blue design and also changes its slogan from "Real College Radio" to the new "Where Music Matters Most."

2009

A 99-watt translator located at 104.5 FM goes live. It is located near Radio-K's studios in the Rarig Center on the West Bank Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota.

October 3, 2009

Radio K goes on FM 24 hours per day at 104.5 FM and 100.7 FM

2010

Radio K now regularly receives accolades from local newspapers and magazines, especially the weekly *City Pages* which has consistently ranked the station among the best for music in the region. Pitchfork Media founder Ryan Schreiber also commonly cites the station's influence as having been an integral factor in his decision to start an online publication dedicated to the coverage of independent music.

2011

New U of M President Eric Kaler appears on Radio K's "Rock 'n Roll Over" to celebrate back to school and his inauguration week.

Posted by rocke014 at 8:59 AM | [No Comments](#)

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