



Contributed by
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Radio Days at Nichols

The story of campus radio on the Hill began a short time after the founding of the Nichols Junior College in 1931. During the 1930s and on into the '50s, the campus (or, to be more precise, Budleigh Hall) enjoyed a number of unofficial, unlicensed, dorm-based radio stations, including WNJC, WEFA, WDBC, WVOW, and MUCK — essentially Dictaphone hookups with a range of two floors in Budleigh. A March 25, 1939 article in the student newspaper, "The Budget," described operations as "the latest popular recordings as requested, campus news, time flashes, interviews with coaches and other selected personalities, and cooking recipes and other household hints...."

The first mention of a highly anticipated official college station appeared in an April 1950 issue of "The Budget" under the heading "Nichols College to Have Radio Station: Studio Nearing Completion." The first broadcast, however, was reported to have occurred two years later, on November 3, 1952, and could be heard at 640 on the AM dial. Radio Club members agreed on WNRC as the call letters, for Nichols Radio Club. Members were responsible for scheduling, announcing, script writing, bookkeeping, and technical support.



Top left, the early days of radio at Nichols Junior College. Top right, the 1958 studio boasted a "control room with a 50-watt transmitter, two three-speed turn tables, a two-speed tape recorder, record recorder, two dynamic microphones, one Cardyne microphone, Slim Trim microphone, floor stands, boom, and two monitors."

Additional technical services and advice were provided by Penn Brown, a well-known radio personality affiliated with WTAG in Worcester.

Situated on the second floor of Academy Hall, WNRC, like many campus stations, was a low power, closed circuit or carrier AM system sent over a wire to each dorm. The station's transmitter was located in the gym, with the telephone lines connecting the studio in Academy with the transmitter.

WNRC's original broadcast radius was approximately three miles. Students were on air Monday through Thursday in the afternoons and evenings, offering a wide variety of programming, including classical music, Latin American music, sports, news, interviews, and dramatic selections. By 1956, the broadcasting of basketball and baseball games direct from the gym or athletic field was added.

From radio silence to "Polka Bob"

Running a radio station requires dedication, time, technical expertise, and money. WNRC often struggled to stay on the air. Between 1961 and 1975, there were long periods of radio silence due to technical difficulties and lack of funding.



The 1966 yearbook noted that "The [radio] club has eliminated all methods of broadcasting except the one of having a small but adequate transmitter in each dormitory connected by wire to the station, and rented from the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company." The next year, and for a number of years thereafter, WNRC was inoperative.

Passionate radio enthusiasts, however, persevered. As early as 1965 the Radio Club had begun planning to move from AM to FM, which would eliminate the need for wires all over campus, extend the range, and improve the sound quality. Finally, in fall 1974, the FCC had approved the college's application to move to FM. By spring 1975, the station was reborn as WNRC-FM 91.1. A 30-foot tower with a two bay antenna was mounted on the Academy roof giving the station a 15-mile signal.

By spring 1978, for the first time in its history, WNRC had women DJs. Programming now ran Sunday to Friday, from 3:30 PM to midnight (compared to big Boston 10 watt college stations that were on air four or five hours daily).



In the 1980s, although there were a large number of students interested in disc jockeying, aging equipment was a major problem. However, by 1987, with the purchase of a new transmitter, WNRC was back on the air, now broadcasting at 95.1. There were now 50 active members and, with the addition of morning hours, 7-11, airtime expanded from 24 to 60 hours.

Some of that time was filled with community hosts. In 1989, WNRC partnered with the Communication Explorers from Webster. Their members hosted their own shows on Friday and Saturdays, playing music and broadcasting sporting events at Nichols and local high schools. "Polka Bob" Guyette started his polka show, co-hosting with his son who was a freshman at the time, and he is still going strong. (It was not the first time polka music was aired on WNRC; in 1956 J. Hamill and M. Stiles hosted "Polka Party" on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays.) Oxford native Barry Wilson, a talented musician, successful music promoter and radio DJ, has also been a fixture at the station for more than a decade.

A new station for a new millennium

By 1998, WNRC was once again off the air, but returned to the airwaves by spring 1999, thanks in large part to the efforts of community engineer Peter George and new club advisor, Andrea Becker '96 MOL '10. By 2000, a new automated

computer system allowed continuous programming. In 2003, after broadcasting from Academy Hall for more than 50 years, WNRC moved to the newly renovated Alumni Hall. On February 11, 2004, the station was dedicated to James (Jimmy) Gahan IV, a popular student DJ who had died in the tragic Station Nightclub fire in West Warwick, R.I. a year earlier, on assignment from WNRC to interview the lead singer of Great White.

In 2005, WNRC received a long-awaited nod from the FCC to inch up the FM dial to 97.5. The new call letters were WNRC-LP. The station also increased its wattage from 14 to 100 watts, allowing an increase in service area to local communities throughout southern Worcester County, particularly the towns of Dudley, Charlton and Webster. As for the old station in Academy, the college sold the original equipment and license to Peter George. WXRFB FM, one of the first non-commercial all-odlies stations in the country, is still operating from Academy at 95.1 FM.

In 2006, WNRC-LP added Internet streaming and in 2013, with the purchase of state-of-the-art equipment, relocated to the ground floor of the Fels Student Center, where it was re-dedicated to Gahan. There are currently about 25 active student members and six community member shows.



In the 1975 studio, disc jockeys had access to two turntables, two mikes, two tape decks, and a mixer.



In 1975, a 30-foot tower with a two bay antenna mounted on the Academy roof gave birth to WNRC-FM.

For some years now, there has been a troubling rise in colleges and universities selling their radio licenses and frequencies for revenue. Commercial-free college radio has an important function providing variety and a platform to hear what otherwise might not be heard on radio, such as indie rock or underground hip-hop, but also specialty shows featuring genres from jazz to bluegrass to a surprisingly large number of metal and punk subgenres. In addition, students working at the station learn a range of skills — leadership, speaking, entrepreneurial, sales, technical, and business management.

Happily, Nichols intends to keep WNRC-LP on the air. In fact, the station's advisor, Justin Dolan '09 MBA 14, is currently looking for ways to transition from the analog to a digital format, which offers a cleaner signal and less signal degradation. Stay tuned! You can find a program schedule at wnrc.nichols.edu/schedule.



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