

The Evolution of KCPR:

Recommendations Established by the Core Committee Aimed at Meeting the Academic Mission of Cal Poly

KCPR Evolution Core Committee
Review and Recommendations
Executive Summary

Draft Submitted by Frank Warren, with Mary Glick and David Riveness
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Introduction

College student-operated radio has existed in the public frequency since Union College in Schenectady, New York began transmitting in October, 1920. Since then over 400 campus radio stations across the country have established themselves as stewards of the public airwaves often found on the “left side of the dial.” In the fall of 2014 a group of stakeholders assembled to assess the current state - and prepare recommendations for the future - of KCPR, the student-led radio station operated on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly). The KCPR Evolution Core Committee has met regularly (in-person, via conference call, and online) since September, 2014. This report summarizes the discussions, findings, actions, and recommendations being made the Committee, which the Cal Poly Journalism Department has called its “Blue Ribbon Panel.”

The KCPR Evolution Core Committee was created to address a growing concern amongst campus officials, department staff, students, alumni, and the community regarding the future of KCPR. The legendary college radio station, founded in 1968, has been nationally recognized for excellence, has launched the careers of hundreds in the arts, entertainment, and broadcast fields, and provides Cal Poly with a true “learn by doing” lab for students across many majors and interests. More recently the station has been the subject of controversy, under the threat of closure by the University.

Purpose

Over the past year the Journalism Department has wrestled with the fate of the station which has become less of a Journalism lab, and more like a student-run campus club. KCPR has drifted from its original intent, outlined in the most recent station guidelines developed by the Journalism Department (1986), as a “practical laboratory experience for students enrolled in Broadcast Journalism classes and for other allied courses in the department.”

Until the late part of the 1990’s, KCPR functioned as an arm of the Journalism Department’s news, information, and broadcast management curricula. A dedicated Faculty Advisor assisted student leadership in setting goals, maintaining FCC standards, operation principles, and accountability measures for student staff. A Journalism course was designed to train KCPR on-air staff and academic credit was available. For reasons, unknown to this Committee, the class went away, and so did the focus and attention of a Faculty Advisor. The station’s engineer was no longer on-site. The Department appears to have vacated oversight, and soon the station began to exist almost exclusively as a student-only operation.

The reduced Department leadership and oversight was brought to the attention of the University, and local community, when student on-air staff made inappropriate statements while conducting a pledge drive in May, 2014. Doug Epperson, Dean of Liberal Arts, which houses the Journalism Department, under pressure from the Dean of Students office, publically contemplated selling the station’s license. The license, as well as the frequency on the dial that KCPR inhabits, it should be noted, is of significant value. FM licenses are valuable commodities as few are available, and they offer great

technical broadcast opportunities. This, for a University, may include off-campus learning, as well as a potential to earn revenue from private broadcasters.

Student leadership of the station, along with concerned alumni, asked the Department to consider the benefits the station provides for its learning staff, and the potential for more academic guidance and structure (along with the history of the station) before seeking ways to end the program. The Department agreed to examine the state of the station, while asking for input on a path forward. The Dean of Liberal Arts made only one request in allowing for the Committee's formation - that any plan and structure for KCPR going forward would support the academic mission of Cal Poly.

The options put forth to the KCPR Evolution Core Committee included the following:

- KCPR would be disbanded completely, with the University selling the radio license
- The station would become an Independent Student Organization (ISO), like a fraternity, which would be recognized by the University for on campus facility usage
- The station would become an Associated Students, Inc. (ASI) student club (similar in charter and bylaws to Cal Poly's 300+ student-led clubs)
- KCPR could continue to exist under the banner of the Journalism Department after developing both short and long term plans to maximize its potential
- Cal Poly could select a different campus department or organization to house and oversee KCPR

Methods and Findings

The KCPR Evolution Core Committee was called together by **Mary Glick**, Associate Professor and Chair of the Journalism Department. Glick brought her background in print journalism, corporate communication, journalism education, digital press, and public relations to Cal Poly in 2012. In seeking to review the station's vision and policies, while developing a more seamless link between student radio staff and the Journalism Department, Glick told The Tribune in December of 2014, that the Committee would help build "a model for KCPR to succeed in the modern media age." Glick brought in two alumni to join her as co-chairs of the Committee.

Dave Riveness was once Airstaff Instructor and General Manager of the station during his Cal Poly career, in which he earned his Bachelor's Degree in Liberal Studies (1990). He went on to earn a Master's Degree in College Student Personnel from Bowling Green State University in 1993. Riveness is the Director of Global Facilitations at Eagle's Flight, a leader in the development and delivery of business-relevant learning programs. Riveness saw the need to expand the discussion of KCPR's current state of issues to bring in perspectives from alumni and other stakeholders who may suggest practices and principles which would strengthen the station's future. Riveness assisted Glick in developing the Committee roster and launching the group's online discussion board.

The other co-chair is **Bruce Flohr**, one of KCPR's most well-known and industry-successful alumni. Flohr is the Chief Financial Officer and Executive Vice President of Red Light Management, an artist management company with a popular roster which includes acts like Dave Matthews Band and Foo Fighters. Flohr, the former Vice President of RCA Records launched his storied career as the Music Director at KCPR while earning his Bachelor's Degree in Journalism (1989). Flohr brought energy and enthusiasm to the Committee while also meeting with current KCPR students to share his experiences and hear their thoughts about the station's future.

The membership of the KCPR Evolution Core Committee also included:

Haley Brown: KCPR student Promotions Director. Senior majoring in graphic communication.

Eric DeWeese: Executive Administrator, USC radio, Los Angeles and San Francisco

Parker Glenn: KCPR student General Manager. Senior majoring in business

Neal Losey: Music Director, KCBX-FM, San Luis Obispo, Journalism Advisory Board member, airstaff instructor and KCPR leadership alumnus

Lynn Metcalf: Professor and Chair, Cal Poly Marketing

Thomas Morales: Broadcast technician, Cal Poly Journalism Department.

Patricia Piburn: Broadcast lecturer, Cal Poly Journalism Department

Rachel Wakely: Student majoring in Journalism

Frank Warren: Division Manager, Behavioral Health Prevention & Outreach, SLO County, consultant Cal Poly student orientation programs, KCPR leadership alumnus

The Committee first convened electronically, joining a *Proboards* online community discussion forum in early September, 2014. The Committee members were able to introduce themselves and share their stake in participation on the panel. Members represented a variety of experiences and points of view, including those not affiliated with Cal Poly or KCPR prior to this Committee. The group held its first conference call on Thursday, September 11, 2014. The agenda consisted of group introductions, discussion of the *Proboards* tool, future meetings, and a deeper discussion of the options outlined above.

It was evident during the initial call that the KCPR Evolution Core Committee was most interested in exploring options that would keep the station broadcasting within the Journalism Department at Cal Poly. Members recommended a reexamination of the station's mission and vision to see if the current operations were in alignment. A face-to-face meeting was scheduled and during the interim period, Riveness led Committee members in providing statements outlining their individual views about the direction KCPR should take.

Those discussions included recommendations ranging from having student content be provided online while operating the licensed station with a professional staff, to re-establishing a journalism laboratory, to the exploration of professional mentors to be engaged to advise student staff. Glick urged the group to consider some basic questions before crafting too many solutions at the outset: "What is the mission of

KCPR -- what is it currently and what should it be? Once we can articulate its reason for being -- the WHY -- then we can start to address the HOW."

The group held a meeting in the offices of the Graphic Communications Department (the location of the former broadcast studio) on October 9, 2014. The meeting's agenda was predicated on three key questions:

- **Why** should KCPR exist? This discussion point allowed the Committee to examine justifying KCPR's future existence, as opposed to answering why it exists today or why it existed in the past. A good amount of opinion reflected the desire to see the station remain Cal Poly's, and to see it re-established as an academic endeavor.
- **What** will be the ways in which KCPR will fulfill its mission? This discussion generated a wide array of ideas, thoughts, and suggestions. Programming ideas ranging from use of the station for academic and research press conferences, as "insert studios" for remote broadcasts with media outside of the area, to live sports coverage, to enhanced news coverage were shared along with suggestions for fundraising, student leadership development, and on-air events.
- **How** will we get there? The Committee began mapping out vision and mission concepts which would inform the actions, changes, policies, structure, and oversight needed to move the station into the future. These discussions included establishing new station guidelines, staff participation and academic criteria, hours of operation, and how best to increase and maintain the stations' profile with the campus community.

Key to the KCPR Evolution Core Committee's membership are its current station leaders; students who have been active in maintaining volunteers, structure, credibility and providing vision as the future of the station is being deliberated. During the October 9th meeting Glenn and Brown outlined the current leadership and staffing structure, on-air operations, and represented the many students who are interested in the future of KCPR. Both Glenn and Brown were supportive of more involvement by the Journalism Department, with a primary desire to see student leadership remain a principle of the station's operations.

Committee members were given the opportunity to craft their individual and small-group mission and vision statements, which were shared with the entire group via email in the weeks following the meeting. A follow-up conference call was held on November 10, 2014. This call focused on the mission and vision discussions and statements written during and after the face-to-face meeting. It was decided on that call to establish a small writing team (sub-committee) to finalize a recommended Mission Statement and Vision Statement. The sub-committee consisted of Parker Glenn, Haley Brown, and Mary Glick. The group constructed an online survey (*Qualtrics*) tool to get panel input on varied drafts of statements, consult over specific words and concepts, and to get Committee consensus on final language.

At the heart of the Mission and Vision discussions was the Committee's agreement that KCPR is a modern media organization with new technology, and resources that have

yet to be exercised. This led Committee members to examine setting a Mission and Vision that both hallmarked KCPR's history and legacy, while looking directly ahead. Over the months of December, 2014, and January, 2015, the Committee crafted and approved recommending the following statements be adopted:

MISSION STATEMENT:

KCPR-FM is Cal Poly's radio station, a learn-by-doing laboratory where students develop the skills to lead a professional multimedia organization that engages, informs and entertains Cal Poly and its community.

VISION STATEMENT:

*KCPR-FM represents the diverse cultural, intellectual and creative life of Cal Poly.
We are at the forefront of innovative content and technology.
We know and serve our community.
We develop future leaders.*

The November conference call also yielded a need to look at other college radio station manuals, standards of practice, and operation guidelines. Committee members Dave Riveness, Patti Piburn and Parker Glenn began looking at viable examples and templates from college stations such as Elizabethtown University and North Carolina State. Piburn and Glenn have begun drafting a new KCPR Operations Manual to be approved by the Department's faculty in April, 2015.

To continue exploring recommendations made during the various panel meetings, the Mission and Vision subcommittee continued to survey Committee members to begin crafting recommendations based on the following questions:

- **Staffing:** Should on-air positions at KCPR be open only to students? If not, who would be allowed to be on the air? Should all students associated with the station be enrolled in a class? If so, what kind of class is envisioned?
- **Hours:** Should KCPR have specific hours of live programming? Should it include overnight live broadcasting? Are there tools available which would allow staff to record shows for automated overnight broadcast?
- **News:** Should KCPR incorporate more news/information programming?

The results of each survey have been shared with the Committee membership. The Committee agreed, unanimously, that all KCPR on-air staff should have, at the least, a connection to Cal Poly (students, faculty, staff, alumni) with a majority of that group recommending on-air positions be open only to current students (of any major). The Committee was also in favor of having students enroll in a course for academic credit. The discussion forum allowed Committee members to make a number of suggestions for what the course should look like.

A survey, and subsequent online discussion, regarding the station's hours of operations was conducted in February, 2015. A solid majority of the Committee felt KCPR should eliminate live overnight programming and rely on student-programmed automation to keep the station on air during those hours. Committee members cited issues of safety,

the benefits of modern technology, and the overall need to not reduce opportunities for student involvement. The Committee identified issues, such as best practices for training new staff, authorized access to the station, and scheduling standards, and suggested these be addressed within the new Operation Manual.

The final question deliberated by the group concerned the extent of news programming on the KCPR schedule. The Committee agreed, overwhelmingly, that there should be an increase in news and information programming on KCPR. Discussion centered on how the news effort is in direct alignment with the academic mission of the Department and offers a wide opportunity for student involvement in KCPR. Recommendations ranged from creating a radio class for students to build skills in news reporting, to explore other storytelling and news presentation formats, to expanding the role of on-air staff allowing students to do both news and regular programming, to updating the curriculum for the existing broadcast news course (JOUR 333).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The KCPR Evolution Core Committee has concluded its initial charge. The group has met and conferred on several aspects of the station's future in order to meet the Dean's request to develop a plan and structure for KCPR going forward that supports the academic mission of Cal Poly. In addition to adoption of the Mission and Vision Statements outlined above, the Committee is requesting the College of Liberal Arts, the Journalism Department, and the current student leadership of KCPR to consider exploration of the following:

1. ***KCPR should remain an entity of Cal Poly State University's Journalism Department***, within the College of Liberal Arts. The Committee would like to see the Department play a stronger role in guiding and supporting the students selected to operate the station. This includes the dedication of a Faculty Advisor with enough time and resources to properly steward the students and community members invested in the station's success. This also includes additional course curricula for academic credit; increased opportunities for students to participate in a radio laboratory and "learn by doing" while being held accountable as students within the Department's oversight.
2. ***The Journalism Department and Student Leadership should adopt the Mission and Vision Statements crafted by the KCPR Evolution Core Committee.***

MISSION STATEMENT:

KCPR-FM is Cal Poly's radio station, a learn-by-doing laboratory where students develop the skills to lead a professional multimedia organization that engages, informs and entertains Cal Poly and its community.

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3. ***The Journalism Department should create a KCPR class.*** Student staff members should be offered academic credit for their work within the KCPR media laboratory, while meeting the standards of a Cal Poly course. This may include homework, testing, lecture and broadcast-related deliverables (e.g. production, packaged broadcasts, etc.).
4. ***KCPR should limit its overall number of personnel.*** The Department and student leadership should create a model for station operations and maintenance which accounts for an appropriate staffing level with more shared responsibilities.
5. ***KCPR on-air staff should be currently enrolled as students at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo.*** The Committee understands that community members and alumni have long played an important role in providing on-air programming. However, the ability for the Journalism Department to maintain an academic focus and build “the voice of Cal Poly” will require some limits to its staffing. The Committee recommends if there are not enough students to staff the station, then the Department may open positions for faculty, staff, and possibly alumni.
6. ***KCPR should better engage and organize Alumni.*** To honor the great history of the station, and the obvious deep connection station alumni feel for their KCPR experience, the Department should, at the least, create an alumni listing for communication and potential interactivity. The Department should assist student leadership in exploring the benefits of a KCPR Chapter through Alumni Relations. This may support regional meetings and events, fund raising efforts, and online and “on-air” reunions.
7. ***Media professionals, including alumni, should be engaged as advisors, mentors, supporters, and coaches.*** Because KCPR generates a wealth of talented broadcasters, business leaders, and creative graduates, KCPR should seek ways to engage alumni in supporting the station outside of on-air broadcasting. An Alumni Advisory Board should be created to meet regularly with station and Department leadership to monitor KCPR progress, explore task forces for specific issues, and provide opportunities for student mentoring.
8. ***KCPR should reduce or eliminate live programming in overnight hours.*** In order to meet the campus’ interest in student safety, as well as the safety required to protect equipment and educational materials, KCPR should limit the use of the facility in overnight hours. That time period was always necessary to accommodate the many students desiring time on-the-air, and was often reserved for trainees. However, new technology available to KCPR allows students to pre-record broadcasts for automated play overnight. These broadcasts may be recorded during the day while access to staff, mentors, and coaches is more available.
9. ***The Journalism Department should seek partnerships with professional media consultants.*** The Department and the College of Liberal Arts should make the financial resources available to contract with media professionals who

may offer the station and its staff additional learning and sustainability. For example, for many years, KCPR alumni have taken positions in local media outlets, including radio. By partnering with a station like KCBX, students at KCPR will be exposed to professional levels of broadcasting, programing, underwriting, and other fundraising. Furthermore, an alumnus, like Committee member Neal Losey (KCBY Music Director) may assist the Journalism Department's broadcast faculty as an on-air student "coach" as well as other KCBX staff available to mentor students.

10. ***A revised and updated KCPR Operations Manual should be completed and implemented by the fall of 2015.*** The Committee has already begun work on this and should have a draft ready by April 1, 2015.
11. ***KCPR should institute intentional evaluation and review of its practices and policies.*** The student leadership, along with the Faculty Advisor, should set annual performance measures and outcome goals to monitor the progress and learning objectives of the station. KCPR, steeped in tradition and having not wavered greatly from its core elements of student-operated radio, should maintain practices that have proven successful. The Executive Committee, for instance, allows students to develop and fill their resumes with concrete leadership and management skills. The station, and Department, should actively review and revise practices to optimize effectiveness.
12. ***The Journalism Department should tell the KCPR story.*** As the station approaches its 50th Anniversary, there is a great history and success story to share of this unique student-led radio station. The Department should seize the opportunity to engage public relations, marketing, and news students to archive, document, and share the KCPR story with the community and broader public. This will continue to solidify the station's place in the University's great legacy of "Learn By Doing."

