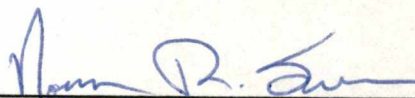


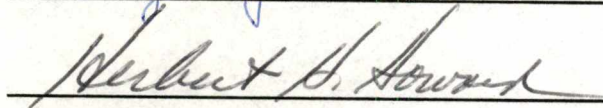
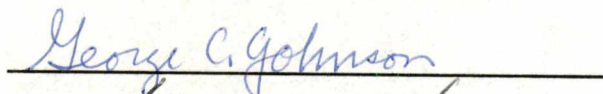
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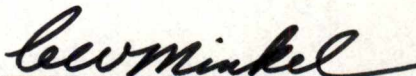


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RADIO PROGRAMMING AND FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH:
A CASE STUDY

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Gary R. Kolarcik
August 1987

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the Franciscans (O.F.M.) of Holy Name Province, New York, who made my pursuit of this graduate degree possible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the course of my thesis research, a number of scholars have assisted me generously. In particular I am indebted to Dr. Sam Swan who served as my director. His assistance and encouragement were invaluable to this work and my entire degree program. I also wish to thank Dr. Herbert H. Howard and Dr. George C. Johnson who served on my committee. Their recommendations made this study a more readable and practical tool.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. James Fletcher who offered his expertise in the structuring of the focus group interviews used in this study.

Finally, I am grateful to Ann Lacava whose encouragement and patience helped bring this work to completion in its final form.

ABSTRACT

Radio broadcasting today is experiencing a high degree of program specialization, audience fragmentation and industry competition. This has resulted in managers becoming increasingly dependent on research to guide their programming decisions. For many broadcasters today, focus group interviewing has become the preferred qualitative research methodology.

This study applied this technique to evaluate the programming of WUTK-FM by listeners to the station. Three focus group sessions were conducted in February, 1987 to ask listeners about the strengths and weaknesses of the station's programming, the elements that should be changed or added to the existing album rock format, the station's role in its community (the University of Tennessee), and the music and artist preferences of listeners.

The study found that the strengths of the station's programming included its variety of music, its university orientation, its non-commercial nature, its alternative music format, and its specialty music programs. The station's weak signal (a technical problem) and a lack of awareness of the station (a promotional problem) were cited as the main reasons for its limited audience growth.

Future recommendations included applying for an increase in power from the FCC and initiating strong promotions with high visibility to the target audience.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In their textbook on radio and television programming, Herbert H. Howard and Michael S. Kievman state that "the success of broadcasting as a communications instrument depends squarely on the creation and presentation of attractive programming" (Howard & Kievman, 1983, p.1). With such a high degree of program specialization, audience fragmentation and industry competition today, radio station managers have become increasingly dependent on program and audience research, both quantitative and qualitative, to guide and supplement their own instincts and knowledge of the marketplace.

Research has been a part of radio broadcasting since its inception in the 1920s, and it is likely to play a greater role as the next century unfolds. Today, it is common for stations to budget 5 to 10 percent of their annual income to research, and according to practitioners, it is probable that this figure will increase. Research may not guarantee success, but it is getting more difficult to be successful without it (Keith & Krause, 1986).

Whether commercial or non-commercial, every broadcast station represents a commitment of resources, both public and private. Research in telecommunications is primarily

directed toward clarifying the relationship between resources committed and desired outcomes. As with any investment, there is some level of risk that there will be a loss of these resources should the undertaking fail to meet its objectives. Though the primary purpose of a non-commercial station is not to produce a profit for the licensee, there still exists a close relationship between investments (resources committed) and audiences (desired outcome). As audiences become more divided, as the required program investments increase, and as competition for listeners and advertisers in the marketplace intensifies, the more tools for research are required. The function of research in broadcasting is to reduce risks while increasing service to the audience and to the advertiser, and profitability to the licensee (Fletcher, 1981).

This thesis deals with a qualitative research methodology known as focus group interviewing. This technique was used to evaluate the programming of University of Tennessee radio station WUTK-FM in February 1987. In this introductory chapter, some background material on this station, a statement of the research problem, and the significance of this study will be presented.

Chapter two will review the literature on radio programming strategies, programming and audience analysis, and music programming research.

Chapter three will present focus group methodology as one type of qualitative research gaining more and more popularity among today's broadcasters. Its strengths and limitations as a research tool will be examined, and how the focus group methodology was applied to the study of WUTK's programming will be explained.

Chapter four will present the results from each of three focus groups and give a summary of the findings.

This study will close with a presentation of conclusions and recommendations for future programming and additional research in chapter five.

Background On WUTK-FM

WUTK, a frequency-modulated radio station, broadcasts eighteen hours a day (7 a.m. to 1 a.m.) at 90.3 megahertz (MHZ) with an effective radiated power (ERP) of 128 watts. Studios and transmitter are located in Andy Holt Tower on the University of Tennessee campus in Knoxville, Tennessee. The station is licensed to the Board of Trustees of the University of Tennessee by the Federal Communications Commission. The board has placed responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the station with the Department of Broadcasting in the College of Communications. The head of the department also serves as general manager of the station. He furnishes policy and operational guidelines to

the administrative team composed of the station manager, program director, news director and development director (see Appendix A). The station's funding stems from the department as well as underwriting grants solicited by the station from local retailers.

All station employees are required to be actively enrolled in the university, with staff preference given to broadcasting majors. The station is seen as an extension of laboratory facilities of the department, and all broadcasting majors are expected to serve a period of time working at WUTK to improve their audio production skills and to supplement their classroom experience. Classes in newswriting, production and speech communication are integrated into the regular operation of WUTK. Credit for practicums and independent study at the station is also an available option for students.

WUTK is relatively young in service, having signed on officially on January 4, 1982 at twelve noon. The station took the call letters W-U-T-K to symbolize the community it would serve. The station was established to serve a dual purpose (Carr, 1986):

1. To offer real world experiences in broadcasting to students interested in pursuing a career in broadcasting.
2. To provide entertainment, educational and informational services to the university community.

WUTK's current music format is album rock. The format is designed to appeal to a large segment of the university

community, especially the student population, while providing a distinct alternative to the top-40 music played by the commercial stations in the Knoxville market (see Appendix B). Music selections are taken from the top current rock albums and are played in a heavy-medium-light rotation. So-called "heavy metal" music and singles on Billboard's Hot 100 are avoided. A playlist is compiled and sent out from the station monthly.

Hour-long specialty shows are produced for weekly presentation to serve the diverse listening audience in the university community. These programs are scripted, produced and hosted by advanced production broadcasting students.

In January of 1985, Dr. Sam Swan became head of the broadcasting department and general manager of WUTK-FM. Until that time, the format of WUTK could be described as "free-form" - a blending of jazz, blues, reggae and rock. The idea was that such a format offered something for everyone. But as we will see in chapter two on radio programming strategies, most stations no longer find it possible to be all things to all people. The result is that no one knows when they will hear the type of music they most enjoy, and so the tendency is to be confused and dissatisfied with the station's programming efforts.

In the spring of 1985, an evolution in the format of WUTK began. A change was made to an album rock, new music format. This format is unique to the market, and a special

niche for this low-power FM station in a city of 100 KW FM's. The change was implemented gradually over the summer of 1985. Three categories of music emerged in the rotation: current album cuts; music of local and new artists; and "classic rock" hits.

By November of 1985, a telephone survey was conducted by a broadcasting class under the supervision of the station's research director. This survey questioned a random sample of students on their radio listening behavior, their music preferences, and their opinions on informational programming on radio. At this time, the music rotation was changed to two categories, with "classic rock" music being eliminated. It was judged that this music was already widely available on other local stations, and that WUTK's limited music library made it impossible to compete in that music category.

In the spring of 1986, another random sample telephone survey was conducted by the station's development director. This survey obtained data on radio listening behavior, demographics on WUTK listeners, and information on their spending habits. By the summer of 1986, the music format was modified to one category of music - new rock. All current rock albums were combined into a contemporary format that was fresh and still an alternative in the market. The station focused on the best-produced albums, eliminating abrasive, harsh-sounding music with offensive or

non-understandable lyrics, and albums not professionally produced for broadcast.

Other changes in the operation of WUTK were also implemented in 1985. The new leadership desired a greater integration of the station with the department as a whole. Graduate assistants were appointed to serve as administrative staff at the station, and more classes became active in the running of the station.

In summary, the leadership offered more active, direct guidance to the station, and the station reaffirmed its dual purpose: to supplement students' classroom experiences with a real-world experience in broadcasting, and to serve the needs of its target audience, the University of Tennessee community. It is this radio station, WUTK, which was the focus of the research study described in this thesis.

Statement of the Research Problem

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville audience of some 25,000 students completely changes about once every four years. With such audience transience and diversity, WUTK's programming must follow the change. Research personnel at the station attempt to survey the audience periodically to assure that the station is fulfilling its mission. As stated in the station's Policy and Procedures Manual, "changes may be made in format, scheduling, or other areas,

but only to conform to new or changed audience preferences as confirmed by research teams. By surveying the audience, WUTK attempts to retain a fresh and listenable format for all its listeners which will satisfy diverse tastes in music" (Carr, 1986, p.22). Later it states: "Current trends in music preference are almost impossible to track continuously. A constant survey of community preferences in music is an absolute must if WUTK intends to retain its alternative status" (p. 45).

A number of formal and informal surveys of the student body have been conducted for the station as previously stated. But no qualitative study had been done using WUTK listeners as respondents. Station managers felt that an evaluation of the modified album rock format was now in order. We needed to have better responses to our questions- not just who listened and for how long, but reasons why people listened to WUTK. We wanted to know the strengths and weaknesses of the programming of WUTK as perceived by the station's regular listeners. We were interested in knowing what elements should be changed or added to the existing format to make it more popular with our listeners. We also wanted to know how important news and informational programming was to our core listeners, and how they perceived the station and its role in the university community. And above all, we needed listeners to describe the kinds or types of rock music they liked best and the

kind that WUTK should play. Asking for artists that were representative of their descriptions of rock music were also deemed helpful to judge whether WUTK's music was on target with its listeners.

It was decided that these kinds of questions could only be answered within a setting conducive to gathering many different opinions and allowing time for responses of greater depth than available in a survey alone. Because of these needs, the focus group research that is the subject of this thesis was conducted in February 1987. As we shall see in chapter three, this methodology allows the broadcaster who desires in-depth evaluation of programming to conduct quick, do-it-yourself research at reasonable cost.

Significance Of The Study

This study is significant because it breaks new ground for research at WUTK. Quantitative telephone surveys have already been done at the station, as noted earlier, to collect data from the station's target audience (students) regarding their radio listening behavior, music tastes and spending habits. But until now, no qualitative research study has been done for WUTK, and no in-depth study evaluating the station's current music and programming by its listeners has been attempted. Following the radio strategy outlined in the McKinsey report in chapter two of

this study (McGuire [Ed.], 1985), it is time to use research to guide future changes in the station's album rock format in order to broaden its audience appeal.

This study is also significant in that it serves as a model for in-house, qualitative research as a low-cost, viable option for stations. When finances are an important consideration, and depth of response and variety of response is required, this study offers focus group interviewing as an attractive research tool to other broadcast outlets, whether or not they are related to educational institutions.

Finally, this study will add to the body of literature on research at non-commercial stations. In the research for this study, virtually no material was found on the implementation of research at non-commercial radio stations. Even if such a study has been done, this study will localize, supplement and update results found elsewhere.

Within the current competitive environment of broadcasting, even non-commercial stations truly interested in serving and retaining their target audiences will need to conduct research on an ongoing basis to keep a pulse on the marketplace and respond with effective programming. This study can be a pioneer step for the use of qualitative research at non-commercial radio stations.

The following chapter presents a review of literature on radio programming strategies, audience analysis, and music research. This will serve as an overview of where

broadcast research has been and where it is going. The following chapters will situate focus group methodology within the broader scope of qualitative research, show how it was applied to the evaluation of WUTK's programming, and then present the results and conclusions of this research project.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter deals with a review of the literature that pertains to current radio programming strategies, audience analysis, and music programming research.

Most sources in the field of broadcasting deal largely with television, cable and the rising new communication technologies. However, adequate information was found on the three areas of concern in this study.

Among the most useful sources were books on radio and programming, and articles in journals and periodicals found in Communications Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, and Topicator. These included the Journal of Broadcasting, Journal of Communication, Journal of Marketing Research, Broadcasting, Radio Only and Television/Radio Age.

Topical words used in this research included "radio programming," "radio broadcasting," "audience research," "social research," "focus groups," "broadcast research," "group interviews," "music programming," and "broadcast management."

The single most important source for this study was Radio: In Search of Excellence (1985). It is no doubt the most current and comprehensive anthology available on radio broadcasting in America today. Though it is comprised of

chapters from various authors, it served, as a whole, as the best model and guide for the study of WUTK's programming.

Radio Programming Strategies

In their classic textbook on broadcast programming, Herbert H. Howard and Michael S. Kievman outlined the historical development of radio programming from the earliest sponsored radio network programs of the 1920s to the format specialization of today's programming (Howard & Kievman, 1983). They described the two basic modes of programming in modern radio broadcasting: block and format.

In block programming, the broadcast day is divided into segments of time or blocks, each devoted to a different type of material. This type of programming strategy emerged in the 1930s. Programs of music, variety, drama, comedy and news were programmed in 15-minute, half-hour, and hourly segments. Musically, hotel dance band broadcasts thrived alongside popular and country music programs. Eventually each radio network tried to establish a major program theme for each night (e.g. music night, variety night, etc.). The block programming approach allowed a station to serve a variety of listeners and advertisers. However, breaks between program blocks interrupt the audience flow. As one audience is lost by the change in programming, a new audience must be established. For this reason, block

programming has been abandoned by many stations in favor of format operation.

In the format approach, a consistent and continuous type of programming is followed throughout the broadcast day. A foretaste of present-day radio programming began in 1935 when independent New York station WNEW sought to overcome network competition by broadcasting recorded music, news every hour on the hour, and using local personality disc jockeys. Along with introducing all-night radio, WNEW started the concept of music and news programming we have today. As the number of radio stations increased and television came onto the broadcasting horizon, the music and news approach became radio's salvation. Radio transformed itself into a companion medium for individuals in an increasingly mobile society, and became more local in advertising and programming.

Howard and Kievman also document how Todd Storz created modern format radio in Omaha, Nebraska in 1954 with repetitive top-tune programming. Texas broadcaster Gordon McLendon added audience participation through contest promotions, fast-paced DJ's and frantic production techniques. These elements of modern radio are taken for granted today (Howard & Kievman, 1983, pp. 60-61).

Radio programming gradually became continuous and specialized rather than diverse and segmented into blocks as total station personality ("image") took precedence over

individual personalities. Many different formats were created, each designed to attract a very precise target audience. There also developed added competition in the 1970s with the rise of FM listenership.

The vital role of programming in the competitive enterprise known as radio programming cannot be exaggerated. Since audience acceptance and profitability usually go together, the primary goal is to attract a target audience through competitive programming. Since radio stations are now so numerous, there is a high degree of program specialization and audience fragmentation. The basic strategy today, therefore, is to devise formats and station images that differentiate stations for the purpose of attracting a steady, loyal listenership. It is no longer feasible for radio programmers to shoot for the public at large or even large demographic age groups. Instead, each station struggles to find its own niche, and that often means programming to surprisingly narrow audiences. An additional objective of radio programming today is to provide service to the public through news, public affairs, community announcements and entertainment elements (Howard & Kievman, 1983, pp. 233-234).

An advantage of format stations is that they provide advertisers with an excellent opportunity for selective target audience campaigns. Current formats include contemporary hit radio (CHR), adult contemporary (AC),

album-oriented rock (AOR), beautiful music/easy listening, country, soft/light rock, news/talk, urban contemporary, and religious. Historically, alternative programming has been the specialty of noncommercial broadcast outlets (Howard & Kievman, 1983, p. 237).

In both the block and format mode, radio stations build their programming from a group of easily identified elements. The competitive environment, made up of many factors within and outside the station itself, influences the listener's choice of any particular radio station. The Arbitron Company, in its booklet on decision making in programming, has suggested that the external factors include other stations in the market, other media, news events, weather, and the station's external promotions. Internal factors affecting listeners' radio choices include on-air promotions, the popularity of air personalities, the quality of on-air production, commercial load, newscast length and placement, and music selection and rotation (see Appendix C). Differences between stations result from the selection and emphasis given these elements, how they are mixed, and the style added through production and presentation techniques. The outcome should reveal a certain station personality or image (The Arbitron Company, 1977, p. 8).

Keith and Krause (1986) have written on the complexity of programming a radio station in today's environment. Besides the increasing competition, the FCC's current "let

the marketplace dictate" philosophy has given each station great flexibility in deciding the nature of its air product. Once a station decides on the format it will program, it then must know how to effectively execute it. To make good programming decisions, station managers rely on the help of research (Keith & Krause, 1986, p. 40).

Rick Sklar, in his article "Programming For Excellence In Radio," emphasized the importance of combining programming and research. He defined programming as "show business imposed on mathematics. The show biz is the creative product. The way a station uses research is an additional measure of its excellence." For Sklar, the best stations research their programming very carefully, weigh the evidence and the way it was gathered against the show business/entertainment factors and their own instincts before making any major changes (Sklar, 1985, p.66).

Sidney Head (1985) differentiated programming strategy from tactics. Programming strategy is the planning and directing of large-scale operations. Tactics, on the other hand, are the methods and techniques used to reach the goals that strategy has defined. For Head, programming is more than the sum of its parts. Decisions about how to combine program elements into an effective whole are just as important as decisions about which items to accept or reject (Head, 1985, pp. 4-5).

Music is the cornerstone of programming for most radio stations, along with news and service features. If there is no total void in the market, then one must decide which existing format will be challenged. Edd Routt, music consultant and author, offered his view on choosing a format in his article on music programming. The first step, he said, was to evaluate competitive stations and their programming thoroughly. This information can then be used to modify or replace an existing program format. Such an evaluation should consider five elements: (1) the technical facilities as compared to those of the competition. The best facility has the best chance to succeed. AM's power and frequency and FM's power and antenna height are important considerations because they determine signal quality; (2) the character of the local market - conservative or liberal, small town or big city, its geographic location, etc.; (3) the choice of a target audience to attract advertisers. Routt suggests profiling each station's six standard demographic groups (teens, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64) in a bar graph for comparison of the market; (4) the available budget of a station; and (5) the potential revenue. Routt says that this evaluation will determine which format is commercially viable and can win in the ratings in a given market (Routt, 1985, pp. 336-338).

Johnson and Jones in their book Modern Radio Station Practices (1972) summarized two different schools of thought

on radio programming. One is that station management should find out what its audience wants through research, and then provide that programming. The other is that the station should provide what it thinks is good programming and what the station can do well and let the material seek its own audience. The first philosophy has in its favor the effectiveness of serving real needs, of being responsive to the public, and of dealing with a "proven" market. In this view, a station must rely on valid and frequent research and perceptive programmers if it is to succeed. Since it is difficult to know exactly what an audience will like among new and untried program ideas, there is a tendency to stick with proven programs and allow others in the marketplace to set the trends. The second philosophy tends to make a station a leader rather than a follower. However, a station may be a leader without followers, programming for an audience that doesn't exist. If, for example, the programming is overly esoteric or abrasive, the station may fail for lack of an audience to attract advertisers (Johnson & Jones, 1972, pp. 31-32).

Another side of radio programming often seen in today's marketplace is the tension between "music radio" and "personality radio". Stations that focus on their music identity trace this emphasis back to the 1960s when the Bill Drake-Dave Chenault team of programmers presented their "much more music" concept at their client stations. Later,

as Routt, McGrath & Weiss pointed out, this idea faded in favor of "personality" radio which emphasized the rapport and popularity of on-air personalities with the audience. Today, stations often bill themselves as the "more music, less talk" station, or the station with the best personalities, especially during the drive-time hours (Routt, McGrath & Weiss, 1978).

Another issue in radio programming is the argument against the implied requirement that every radio station carry some non-entertainment programming. News is one such category and is often regarded as a "throwaway" by music programmers. Routt, McGrath and Weiss addressed this issue as well. They held strongly that many stations should not broadcast news because they are not able to do news well, and because their listeners do not tune into these stations for news. They based their argument on the fact that any program element that contradicts the reason a person tunes into a given station tends to defeat the format. The point was also made that the broadcast spectrum already offers a variety of news, talk, religious, public affairs and public service programming options for the public. Music stations cannot compete in the news field with all-news and network stations. In addition, many broadcasters are criticized by their colleagues for airing poor quality news reports.

On the other hand, these authors feel that news should be considered when planning any format. It should be

considered in light of available capital, market competition and format suitability. Poorly-executed newscasts provide a disservice to the public. They argue that broadcasters simply should not be required to program news when they have neither the resources nor the interest in doing the job properly. When people want news, they generally tune to an all-news station, or one that takes news seriously. It follows that no licensee should place any element of programming into a format if that element cannot be done with competence (Routt, McGrath & Weiss, 1978, pp. 23-25).

As we have stated earlier, there is a close connection between radio programming and the particular station's image or personality. Joint Communications Corporation is just one of many media consultants that has dealt with the "positioning" of radio stations in the minds of their listeners. They have pointed out that a position is not necessarily what a radio station does, but rather where the station fits in the listener's mind in relation to other choices in the market. In the present environment of "over-choice," the public is easily confused unless a radio station's position is extremely clear. Joint Communications has suggested three keys to positioning:

1. Research - use a statistically valid study or a series of focus groups to find out how the listeners perceive radio stations.
2. Strategy - use the research to map out your position in relation to your competitors. This will help you

develop programming and marketing strategy. Keep the strategy simple.

3. Promotion - focus on one key attribute that lets you hold your position (e.g. your morning drive show, "more music, less talk," etc.) (Joint Communications, 1987, p. 53).

Throughout the 1980s, an increasing number of radio stations have turned to program suppliers and syndicators for specialized programming designed to give them that all important edge over the competition. An added incentive for this strategy has been the strong advertising support these programs have received nationally. Broadcasting magazine has offered a comprehensive summary of the growing business of radio program supplying (Broadcasting, July 22, 1985, pp. 58-76).

The most recent and comprehensive study to date on programming was done by McKinsey and Company, Inc. The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) had contracted the company to investigate how some of America's leading radio stations obtained and keep their prominence. In their final report entitled Radio: In Search Of Excellence (McGuire [Ed.], 1985), four basic strategies of radio emerged from their study:

1. Technical strategies to maximize potential audience reach and coverage (Engineering department);
2. Segmentation strategies to capture the largest audience share (Programming department);
3. Sales/Marketing strategies to exploit the station's value to advertisers (Sales/Promotion departments);

4. Reinvestment strategies for self-renewal of the station (Management).

The data on segmentation strategies for programming at the sample stations in this study further revealed an adherence to a three-step process implemented over a 5-year period. Those three steps were:

1. Finding a programming "hole" in the market through research (years 1 and 2);
2. "Taking down the walls" of the format; that is, modifying the format to make it more broad-based in audience appeal (years 3 and 4);
3. Becoming "synonymous" with the community of service to achieve mass market appeal and win sustainable competitive advantage (year 5 and beyond).

In the McKinsey study, all eleven sample stations worked at being the best in their market at one thing initially. They put strong emphasis on the importance of experimentation and research to find their niche in the market. This was combined with knowledge of their own marketplace, the ratings books, and their own perceptual research.

Once the stations in this study gained domination in their chosen format, they moved to become the top station in their overall market. While they retained their essential format, they began a strategy to broaden their format's audience appeal in order to move into the competition's space. Here stations again learned more about their listeners' likes and dislikes through extensive research,

broadening and adapting the format to the audiences' lifestyle. Other elements such as news, weather and breaks were evaluated and mixed in with the music programming. Basically, these stations used a four-part formula for "taking down the walls" of their formats:

1. They experimented heavily with additional and innovative format features.
2. They researched heavily - music research, call-in line research, market trend research, competitive research, perceptual research, lifestyle research.
3. They used promotions heavily, such as station appearances at concerts and sports events, and doing ticket giveaways.
4. They got heavily involved with their market's public service activities, like on-air support of charity functions and public service programs.

Stations achieving radio excellence have a personal commitment to their communities. They are perceived not only as a radio station, but as people who fill community voids. These strategies together give stations broader appeal, greater audience numbers, lower per listener costs, and greater profits. These results give such stations the ability to survive and flourish over time.

It was the findings of this study commissioned by the NAB that served as the strategic model for programming modifications at WUTK, and as a guide for this thesis.

Programming and Audience Analysis

In 1985, the National Association of Broadcasters conducted a nationwide mail survey of 262 leading NAB member radio stations. When station managers were asked to identify the five elements which contribute most to successful radio management, the number one item was "targeting programming to a well-defined segment of listeners." In open-ended responses, these managers said they target, position and segment compulsively. To do this, they use all kinds of research. They consider research as feedback from their audience. As they study their audiences, they fine-tune their programming based on this information. This survey confirmed that McKinsey's attributes of excellence were not restricted only to large companies or to the eleven radio stations in that study (McGuire, 1985, pp. 56-60).

Hall and Hall (1977) pointed out the connection between programming and audience analysis when they wrote:

"Programming, while not a legitimate science per se, has become highly sophisticated and the wise program director of today does not ignore any research. All data about the audience is useful input" (Hall & Hall, 1977, p. 101).

Edward J. Noonan, co-director of Survey Research Associates, expressed the importance of audience analysis in broadcasting today when he stated that "a station cannot operate in a vacuum. It has to know who is listening and

why before making any serious programming changes. All stations, regardless of size, must put forth an effort to acquaint themselves with the characteristics of the audience" (Keith & Krause, 1986, p. 118).

According to Sydney Head (1985), programmers have to decide which audience members to attract and which to sacrifice. This process known as targeting, reaches perhaps its highest degree of precision in the field of radio music programming. For Head, "targeting is a matter of applying knowledge of demographics. Programmers acquire this knowledge and the skills for targeting their audiences from the study and practice of audience research" (p. 20). Programmers must be able to interpret standard audience ratings reports, understand their limitations, and know how to apply the information to their own stations. Head classified programmers as "futurists who combine logic, research and tea leaves to be able to foresee changes in public tastes" (p. 17).

Since their beginnings in the 1930s, ratings services have provided broadcasters with information on the number of listeners of a certain age and gender tuned to a particular station at a given time. The quantitative data helped stations choose a format and guided advertisers on where to buy time for their commercials. Advertisers have most desired the 18-49 year old audience. In radio this group is

subdivided into ten-to-fifteen year segments that specific formats target.

In their book on the business of radio programming, Hall and Hall (1977) described six steps programmers should take in analyzing Arbitron's audience reports on their stations:

1. Look at 6 a.m. to midnight total persons 12+.
2. Check your target demographics.
3. Compute your efficiency factor; that is, the percentage of your audience that comes from your target demographics.
4. Break out the market by format.
5. With this information, assess your power, signal and competitive strength.
6. Calculate the audience's time-spent-listening (TSL) to your station (pp. 95-96).

The American broadcast audience is probably the most researched segment of American society. Wimmer and Popowski summarized the kinds of research used to evaluate programs and audiences. Such research falls into three groupings: qualitative and quantitative measures of programs, qualitative and quantitative measures of audiences, and quantitative measures of audience size. Two companies produce most of the radio audience measurements: Arbitron which uses diaries for radio estimates, and Birch Radio which uses coincidental and aided-recall telephone surveys to gather its listening data. As of 1983, Arbitron measured 275 radio markets. Ratings were originally intended to

inform advertisers of audience sizes. As ratings data became more reliable, and competition increased, ratings became the most important decision-making tool and the measure of commercial success. In general, radio stations compare their share of the audience and their cumulative audience to that of other stations with similar formats in the same market. The most popular stations use shares and the least popular use cumulative audiences (Wimmer & Popowski, 1985, pp. 40-45).

Today broadcasters must know more about listeners in order to attract and retain them. Advertisers and agencies have become less comfortable with buying numbers alone and look for audience qualities as well. Christopher Porter of Surrey [sic] Research is one consultant who sees the need for qualitative, as well as quantitative research on the audience. Stations have always catered to the interests of their listeners, but in the 1970s, audience research became much more lifestyle oriented. In the 1980s, broadcasters have studied audience behavior even further through psychographic research, which, by examining motivational factors, provides programmers with information beyond the purely quantitative (Keith & Krause, 1986, pp. 54-55).

Although consultants and broadcasters recognize that we are in the research era of radio programming, they also warn against the misuse of research or an overreliance on data alone. Program director Eric G. Norberg believes that

numbers must back up intuition. Yet "improperly designed or improperly evaluated research yields the wrong answers." To reach a mass audience, Norberg recommends programming to increase your cume base while maintaining the size of the total weekly audience. That way, the share will increase as the cume increases (Hall & Hall, 1977, p. 93).

Consultant Kirt Hanson of Strategic Radio Research also believes that stations can no longer rely on research studies conducted only once or twice a year. For a station to be highly successful, it needs ongoing feedback from its target audience. Then management can plot strategy and determine tactics based on fresh, accurate information from its listeners. For Jim Murphy, program director of WHDH-AM, Boston, "programming is both an art and a science today" (Keith & Krause, 1986, p. 47).

Ted Bolton (1985) has also addressed the proper use of audience research. He says that researchers become worried when a major decision is based on research alone, since no one can produce results that are accurate 100% of the time. Research deals with probabilities and uncertainties. Any station's decisions must take into account factors that are "unresearchable" and weigh science against marketplace experience. He believes that a healthy amount of skepticism acts as the "regulator" which guards against any blind faith in research findings. Successful stations use research "as a supplemental resource that complements other elements of

the station's decision-making process. They use research to have the odds in their favor, that is, to increase the probability that management will make more right decisions" (Bolton, 1985, pp. 106-107).

Christopher Porter of Surrey Research concurred with Bolton when he said that the greatest misconception about research data is that they are absolutes etched in stone. "The greatest fallacy is that research findings are gospel. Regardless of the methodology, any findings should be used as a 'gut adjuster' rather than a 'gut replacer'" (Keith & Krause, 1986, p. 136).

WROR's Lorna Ozman added a warning that research should help direct rather than dictate what a station does. Ozman states: "I rely on research to provide me with the black and white answers and depend on myself to make determinations on the gray areas" (Keith & Krause, 1986, p. 136). Balon made a good point when he wrote: "The key to good research is that it should raise a few more questions while answering others" (Balon, 1981, p. 10).

Finally, Eastman and Klein, in their textbook , emphasized that broadcast research is not an exact science. Findings should not be accepted slavishly since error creeps in through cost-effectiveness compromises and statistical limitations. Nevertheless, ratings and research are essential for offsetting the natural spontaneity and subjectivity common in the field of broadcasting. To put it

simply, "the seat of the pants is the weakest location from which to make a decision" (Eastman & Klein, 1982, p. 52).

Since research data provided by major survey companies and consultants can be costly, stations frequently conduct their own audience studies, deriving useful information, both quantitative and qualitative, from telephone, face-to-face and mail surveys, and from focus group interviews.

Music Programming Research

In his writing of 1985, Richard Harker stated the necessity for music research for radio stations:

"In reality, many of the images a station acquires are a result of its on-air product. Since music typically represents the majority of a station's on-air sound, the music a station plays is critically important in establishing the station's image. Furthermore, regardless of the strength of a station's image, if a station is playing the wrong music, listeners will go elsewhere. So music research is essential for a radio station to stay in touch with its listeners" (Harker, 1985, pp. 97-98).

Routt, McGrath and Weiss (1978) concur on the importance of music research: "Without competent research, programming a music station may be compared to flying in fog, or playing tennis in pitch dark. Far too many radio stations rely on gut instinct, or on the primitive research method of gauging a record's popularity by local and national sales. Studies have indicated that people who buy

records aren't necessarily radio listeners, and vice versa" (p. 89).

Today the music radio field is so splintered as to almost defy definition. As stated in 1978, "there is virtually no universal agreement on the terms used to describe different forms of music available to broadcasters. Words are coined, distorted and mutilated as the programmer looks for ways to label or tag a format, a piece of music, a frame of mind" (Routt, McGrath & Weiss, 1978, pp. 10-11).

This thesis focuses on WUTK which has an alternative, album-rock format. Routt, McGrath and Weiss addressed this music format explicitly when they said that the diversity of its music is one of its unique characteristics. Though more structured than the progressive-rock or underground formats of the 1960s, the idea is still to sound somewhat unstructured. For these authors, AOR stations attempt to offer an "alternative" to the mainstream rockers (Routt, McGrath & Weiss, 1978, p. 88).

Music research takes on even added significance when more than one station airs the same type of music format in a given market. In these cases, stations usually attempt to outperform each other by anticipating music trends and the skillful use of music mixture and various rotation plans (Howard & Kievman, 1983, p. 237).

Another contribution of Routt et al. was their outline of the development of music research. It began in the 1950s

with the calling of record stores to chart local sales. These were compared to national charts in trade publications like Billboard magazine. Later stations began sending researchers into the field to inquire about peoples' musical tastes. Results of these kinds of early studies determined what music to play, where to play it during the broadcast day, and how often. Many stations also relied on request lines to determine the most popular songs locally (Routt, McGrath & Weiss, 1978).

Johnson and Jones (1972) in their book on radio station practices pointed out the problem of relying too heavily on personal judgment when selecting music. Such a method can be too subjective. A programmer working with music day after day can become more musically sophisticated than the audience. He or she becomes something of an expert on the recording business, is aware of performers, and tires of music selections more quickly than the audience. He or she also tends to prefer music that is more innovative, newer and fresher than what many listeners would like. A programmer in this situation often thinks his audience is just as aware of what is going on in musical circles as he is. They may not be (pp. 52-54).

In their article on broadcast research, Wimmer and Popowski have outlined two other popular methods for testing music today: call-out research and auditorium music testing. In call-out research, programmers play 5 to 15 second

"hooks" from current songs for randomly selected respondents over the telephone. Then the songs are rated on a predetermined scale. If this type of research is done frequently, a track record develops for each song. In auditorium music testing, programmers invite people to a location where they listen to and rate from 200 to 400 different "hooks". Both methods indicate which songs are liked and disliked at the moment, but not how often they should be aired (Wimmer & Popowski, 1985, pp. 43-44).

Fletcher and Martin, in their handbook on broadcast research published in 1981, dealt with two other methods for gathering more in-depth and qualitative responses on music and programming for broadcast stations. The first method was the use of listener panels. This is similar to call-out research. A certain number of listeners are phoned weekly for their responses about music and programming in general. The data are then summarized. Over time this method has the advantage of tracking trends in song popularity and music tastes with the same individuals.

The second method is the topic of this study - focus group interviews. Here a number of groups of people are gathered and asked more in-depth questions about music, the station's image, programming features, etc. Typical questions might be: "What kinds of music do you especially like to listen to on the radio?" and "Please name three artists or groups that represent the type of music you most

like to listen to on the radio?" A greater explanation of this methodology will be the topic of our next chapter (Fletcher & Martin, 1981, p. 143).

Music research practitioner Richard Harker specified four potential pitfalls of all music research. They are:

1. Testing with the wrong people. Harker says you should test with listeners to the station, not non-listeners. It cannot be assumed that changing the music to better serve the assumed potential listener will increase the station's audience. In fact, it may antagonize present listeners since they are more sensitive to changes in programming than non-listeners. Generally, new listeners would not be attracted as quickly as old listeners would depart.
2. Testing the wrong songs.
3. Using a poor evaluation method. Harker advises to keep the scale as simple as possible.
4. The difficulty of determining what are the "most popular" songs (Harker, 1985, pp. 101-103).

When music research is done well, many stations produce a playlist on a regular basis. This list is compiled by the music or program director, and is usually sent to retailers and record companies supplying music product to the station. Hall and Hall (1977) outlined the important functions of a music playlist: it serves as an excellent promotional item for listeners; it helps record dealers stock records; it gives the recording industry some feedback; and it informs stations in other markets. Within a given station, the playlist serves as a programming guideline for music selection and rotation (p. 113).

Finally, we mention here a music research method developed by music consultant Lee Abrams. Abrams created a "psychographic" grid to break down the 12-34 year old audience into different listener types determined by music preferences. The purpose of this technique was to very precisely target music to this age group in order to maximize quarter-hour listening. According to Abrams, the album-rock audience is the hardest to graph effectively and even more difficult to reach. "The more involved an individual gets in music artistically, the more difficult it is to program to him" (Hall & Hall, 1977, pp. 108-110).

In light of the fact that WUTK had conducted some quantitative telephone surveys on music and programming within a year and a half period, it was decided that more qualitative information was needed to help guide any future modifications to its album-rock format. The focus group methodology was employed, and in the third chapter, the strengths and weaknesses of this technique as a type of qualitative research will be analyzed, and its application to the study of WUTK's music and programming efforts will be reviewed.

CHAPTER III

FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY AS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research, often called "psychographics," is a relatively new area of broadcasting research. With more intense competition among stations for a greater share of the audience and of advertising dollars, it is becoming a vital part of the broadcast decision-making process.

Qualitative research deals primarily with the motives of audience behavior. While quantitative research provides ratings and is useful as a sales tool, it does not give adequate information regarding questions like: Why do listeners tune in? Why do they tune out? What are the music tastes of the audience? What new programs would be popular? What are the strengths and weaknesses of a program format? What is the overall image of the station? Answering these kinds of questions is the prime task of qualitative broadcast research.

In qualitative research, open-ended questions are often used since they provide the respondent with unrestricted freedom of choice in response. This freedom enhances the data because the respondent has an opportunity to react to a question by expressing his or her attitudes or opinions about the subject. Responses can be in writing by the respondent or they may be recorded on tape by the

interviewer. Often open-ended questions can be exploratory in nature and may lead to a series of questions and other comments about the subject at hand (Rich & Martin, 1981). For most marketers, qualitative research is defined by the absence of numerical measurement and statistical analysis. It provides an in-depth and subjective response from the audience/consumer.

One of the methods of gathering qualitative research data that is enjoying increased popularity among broadcasters today is focus group interviewing. The focus group is a qualitative research strategy for understanding audience or consumer attitudes and behavior.

According to one source, focus group methodology originated in the early 1940s with Herta Hertzog's study of the gratifications felt by listeners to various types of radio programs. The method was also used extensively in studying troop information films during World War II (Merton, 1956, chap. 1). Since the 1950s, focus group interviewing has survived primarily in advertising and marketing research in such decision areas as new product development, advertising campaigns and evaluation of existing marketing strategies.

In focus group interviews, a group of people, commonly referred to as "informants" are interviewed simultaneously and led through an open in-depth discussion of the topic by a group moderator called the "facilitator." The

facilitator's objective is to focus the discussion on the relevant subject areas in a nondirective manner. The identifying characteristic of the focus group is controlled group discussion which may be used to gather preliminary information for another research project, to help develop questionnaire items for survey research, and to gather other qualitative data as a foundation for further study (Wimmer & Dominick, 1987). It is potentially misleading to assume that qualitative research must always be provisional. It is just as appropriate to conduct focus groups after a quantitative project as before it (Calder, 1977, p. 356).

When it is used with an understanding of its peculiar strengths and weaknesses, focus group interviewing can contribute to efficient and effective management. Since it is considered to be a technique of qualitative research, it is not suited to answering questions of "how many" or "how much." Rather, focus groups deal with questions such as "how," "why," and "under what circumstances." For this reason, group interviews are often used as an adjunct to other research techniques or to assist in the interpretation of other research data.

Reynolds and Johnson (1978) did an item-by-item comparison between the results of a qualitative study and a quantitative study conducted by Needham, Harper and Steers Advertising, Inc. Their study showed that the focus group

findings corresponded closely to the information gathered from the large-scale quantitative survey.

Where quantitative rather than directional conclusions are required, however, quantitative data are necessary. The researcher needs to be sure that the focus group methodology is the correct approach for the research problem at hand. The most important task initially is to define an objective that is within the reach of focus group research. This objective should not be a many-sided question, but rather some undivided element in station operation (Wimmer & Dominick, 1987).

With focus groups, broadcasters are looking for specific information. The broadcaster should be thinking: "what concrete steps can I take as a result of these groups, either in programming or promotional modifications or in designing additional, more general research, to give me the complete picture of my marketplace?" Interpretation of the results of focus groups is always highly related to what the original intention was in doing the groups (Balon, 1981).

Most broadcasters and researchers alike would agree that research in itself does not dictate policy making, but is an added help in reaching some decisions in a world of fragmented audiences and competing media. The particular strengths and limitations of focus group interviewing as a method of qualitative research will be the next immediate concern of this study. Following that, the specific

application of focus group methodology to the study of the programming format of radio station WUTK-FM will be presented.

Strengths of Focus Group Interviewing

The accepted goal of focus group research is to document the range, depth, personal contexts and experience shared by participants. Researchers describe a number of advantages of focus group interviews for advertisers, marketers and broadcasters. The strengths of the focus group methodology are:

1. It provides variety and depth of response in a group atmosphere.
2. It reveals the attitudes and behaviors of an audience.
3. It can aid in the construction of questionnaires for quantitative studies.
4. It can supply subjective impressions and identify relevant areas of interest of the target audience.
5. It can be administered quickly and easily.
6. It is a relatively inexpensive, do-it-yourself research method.
7. It allows for checking awareness and image of stations, and the testing of personalities, formats and types of music.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of the group interview technique is that it yields variety of response and depth of response. Unlike quantitative research, the focus group technique is not intended to yield one definitive answer.

It is an exploratory technique, meant to be broadening rather than narrowing, and to supplement quantitative research rather than replace it. Its purpose is to generate a wide range of responses, to develop hypotheses, and to deepen understanding of the topic. The facilitator's unique task is to stimulate diversity of opinion rather than attempt to eliminate it (Miskovic, 1980). An added advantage is that informants often react to each other's comments and use those reactions as springboards for other questions posed by the facilitator. This flexibility in question design and follow-up through appropriate probe questions has the potential of producing responses that are more complete, have greater comprehensiveness, and are less inhibited than those available from individual interviews (Wimmer & Dominick, 1987). Often a brief questionnaire is used before the group interview. These pre-session questionnaires serve to amplify the group interview data (see Appendix E).

Focus groups are especially effective for studying the subtle nuances of attitudes and behaviors of an audience. These attitudes and behaviors often generate hypotheses which provide a stimulus to creative people like copy writers of promotional materials, programmers, and new product managers who need first-hand contact with how the audience thinks and feels about a service or product. In a

very real sense, therefore, focus groups stimulate the thinking of the researchers and/or management.

As stated earlier, focus group interviews can also give direction and guidelines for constructing questionnaires. Sample questions can be tried out, reworked, and key "buzzwords" for the market can be discovered and implemented into a questionnaire. Also, the client is afforded an opportunity to simply listen to respondents in a relaxed atmosphere.

Focus groups are also excellent in supplying those subjective impressions which researchers can use as a springboard to other forms of inquiry. Lists of relevant areas of interest of the target audience to be measured can be developed from the groups. With these items available, the risk of addressing the wrong problem is minimized. When video or audio recordings of the sessions are used, focus groups become an effective and efficient means for bridging the gap between busy management and the ultimate user of the service or program (Cox, Higginbotham & Burton, 1976).

Another advantage of focus group interviewing is that it is a research method that can be conducted quickly. A typical group interview can be completed within two hours. Using a minimum of two groups will allow the researcher to compare responses and recognize trends. The immediacy of focus groups gives informants quick access to the product in

question and gives the facilitator equally immediate response from the informants.

In radio research, focus group interviewing is also attractive as a relatively inexpensive research method that can be done in-house. Recruitment, planning, and conducting of the sessions can all be done by trained staff persons. With all these positive attributes, it is easy to see why focus group interviewing as a qualitative method of research has enjoyed increased popularity and implementation among today's broadcasters.

Topics commonly addressed by focus groups in radio broadcasting research include testing for such concepts as awareness of radio stations in the market, the images of stations, and testing specific types of music and personalities. They also work well for testing out particular reactions to radio programming formats, news reporting, and general operations. In this way, focus group research goes beyond ratings and numbers. In addition, focus groups allow for testing of advertising and promotional copy in virtually any form - storyboard, film, tape, logo, billboard, or even bumpersticker. Broadcasters can experiment with varying color combinations and images and get immediate and concrete feedback from the groups. With so many practical applications, focus groups have become a cost-effective way to elicit immediate feedback

from typical listeners about a station's operations (Balon, 1981, Pt. I).

The results from focus groups are often very different from management's perceptions of its programming. If approached with realistic expectations, focus group research can be extremely helpful. Though focus groups do have a great deal of usefulness, there are some limitations to the focus group methodology that all researchers should be aware of and that apply to the present study as well. These limitations will now be addressed.

Limitations of Focus Group Interviewing

A radio management team can get excellent guidance from "do-it-yourself" focus group research if the objectives are carefully kept within the limitations of this methodology. The limitations of focus group interviewing to be outlined in this section are:

1. It does not yield precise data that can be generalized to an entire population.
2. It is a source of insight, but cannot be as valuable a source of proof as quantitative studies.
3. It is limited by potential bias from the facilitator, the kinds of informants involved, and peer influence within each group.

Being qualitative rather than quantitative, focus group interviewing seldom yields precise descriptive statements about a large population. They represent too small a sample

base to permit generalization. The laws of statistics simply will not allow it. For broad, sweeping inquiries, the focus group cannot replace the random probability sample survey or interview. Focus groups work best when they deal with very specific questions and when they are used in conjunction with other research tools. They should not be used as the only source of information in planning and decision making. Therefore, one important rule all researchers should follow is: "Don't generalize quantitative results from focus group interviews" (Cox, Higginbotham & Burton, 1976, pp. 79-80).

Another limitation of focus group research is a potential problem with reliability (Babbie, 1983). While the data resulting from focus groups is generally in-depth, it is also very personal and unique to the informants who supply it. Therefore, the researcher must be wary of any purely descriptive measurements in focus group research. Generally, one can be more trusting of comparative evaluations of data between groups. The focus group technique is more valuable as a source of insight than as proof.

Another limitation is that focus group results depend so heavily on the skills of the moderator or facilitator. This person can bias the group results if he or she does not have adequate training and experience in small group dynamics.

An additional limitation related to the facilitator and the conducting of the groups has to do with problems with the group participants or informants themselves. Informants are volunteers and do not necessarily represent the population from which they were drawn. Some informants may be domineering and overly talkative, hindering others from expressing their ideas and opinions, especially if those ideas are in the minority. Other participants may be particularly shy within a group setting, and it will take a skillful and observant facilitator to draw out the contributions of these informants. The facilitator must also keep the discussion on the primary topic. If the informants should stray off course without direction, the objectives of the client may not be realized. Finally, there is a danger in focus group sessions that peer influences among the informants will warp the results and give artificial or inadequate data. The presence of recording equipment or the physical characteristics of the location of the sessions may also inhibit some informants.

Babbie (1983) warns against the danger of making hasty conclusions or false assumptions when analyzing qualitative data. This caveat applies to focus group research as well. However, subjectivity is always a danger in analyzing any research results.

Despite the limitations of focus group interviewing offered here, the insights gained are usually so valuable

that researchers feel that focus groups should be included whenever possible in perceptual and qualitative research endeavors. It should be remembered that the advantages and limitations of group interviews are potentialities rather than fixed and inevitable certainties.

Having described focus group interviewing in the context of qualitative research, and having outlined its particular strengths and weaknesses as a research tool, the attention of this study is now directed to the application of the focus group methodology to the study of the music and programming format of radio station WUTK-FM.

Application of Focus Group Methodology To WUTK-FM

As stated earlier in this study, WUTK has undergone some modifications in its format over the last two years. These changes were in keeping with the segmentation strategies of "finding a hole" in the market and then "tearing down the walls" of the format in order to attract a broader audience and become more competitive with other stations in the local market.

To help guide these modifications and also in keeping with good programming policy and planning, two random sample telephone surveys were conducted to solicit feedback from the station's target audience - University of Tennessee

students. One survey was conducted in November of 1985. Besides demographic information, questions were asked regarding respondents' radio listening behavior, music artist preference, radio news, public affairs and public service.

In the spring of 1986, a telephone survey was conducted to study the lifestyles and purchasing habits of students who listen to WUTK.

In this study, it was decided that qualitative research was needed to get a more extensive evaluation of the modified format from core listeners to the station. To achieve this goal, the focus group methodology was employed and three sessions were conducted in February of 1987.

There are several procedural steps in focus group research described by practitioners in the current literature (Wimmer & Dominick, 1987). In this section, each step will be briefly described along with its application to the present study of WUTK.

Determining Specific Objectives

This step is similar in all types of scientific research. It is important before informants are recruited and before any research is conducted to decide on the direction the study will take. What is the problem being addressed by the research? What do the researchers want to learn from the study?

In the case of WUTK, the management of the station wanted to know how core listeners to the station describe the kind or type of rock music they like to listen to most on radio. They also wanted to know the names of some of the artists who would represent this kind of rock music. In addition, management wanted to learn how listeners to WUTK would evaluate the music format, various music programming features, and the news and informational programming of the station. They also wanted to discover the reasons why members of the audience listen to the station and how they perceive the station and its role in the community.

With these objectives in mind, the following questions were used for each session:

- Describe the kind or type of rock music you like best; name three artists or groups that represent the type of rock music you like most.
- What do you consider the strengths or most positive elements of WUTK's programming? Why do you listen to WUTK?
- What are weaknesses in WUTK that you would change if you managed the station?
- How could the music be improved on WUTK? What should be added to the existing format?
- How do you feel about other music programming elements on WUTK, like specialty shows and music information features?
- How do you feel about news and information programming on WUTK? Should there be more or less?

Selecting A Sample

Because focus groups are small (usually between 5 and 12 informants), researchers define a narrow audience for a study. The size of each group should not be so large as to preclude adequate participation by most members. On the other hand, each group should not be so small that it fails to provide substantially greater variety and depth of response than an interview with one individual. Normally the type of sample depends on the purpose of the focus groups. The most important consideration is to identify the members of the population whose ideas and feelings bear upon the research objectives. In marketing terms, exclusive and brand loyal listeners would be ideal as informants when dealing with the evaluation of a radio programming format. These members of the audience would be the most committed core of the audience of the station.

To lessen the cost and time of recruiting informants for this study, and to include those listeners who are most loyal and committed to the station, a sampling frame of core listeners was used. A list of over 500 listeners to the station was compiled from those who had been involved in contests at the station, those who had been on-air promotion winners of records, concert tickets, etc., those who had called in music or informational requests to the station, and those who had contacted the station to give voluntary feedback or to ask for placement on the station mailing

list. Every third person on the list was called and invited to participate in the focus groups. It was important to overrecruit since work and class schedules and general apathy among students tend to decrease the level of cooperation. Calling participants back on the day of the session itself as a reminder to attend helped to increase actual turnout.

Determining The Number And Composition Of The Groups

There is no magic formula for the precise number of focus groups required for a study. However, most researchers conduct two or more groups on the same topic so that results can be compared, and trends can be spotted, and to allow for individual variances in each group.

It is also recommended that the groups be as homogeneous as possible. The more socially and intellectually homogeneous the group, the more productive its results. The degree of homogeneity attainable is dependent on the size and nature of the sample from which participants are drawn. When at all possible, individuals should be matched according to education, occupation, age and religion.

In the study of WUTK, a high degree of homogeneity was easily attained because most listeners of the station are University of Tennessee students. Therefore, their present

occupation, educational level and age were not considered determining factors in any differences among the groups.

Three groups of core station listeners were successfully recruited for this study. In group one, twenty-two individuals were recruited and eleven (7 men, 4 women) actually participated in the session. In group two, nine individuals were recruited and five (5 men, 0 women) actually participated in the session. In group three, thirteen individuals were recruited and eight (6 men, 2 women) participated in the session. A group of twelve individuals (7 men, 5 women) was also used as a pre-test group for the pre-session questionnaire. These twelve students were randomly selected from the University of Tennessee student directory and from broadcasting classes at the university.

Preparing The Study Mechanics

The study mechanics for a focus group include finding a place to conduct the groups, setting up of recording equipment to tape the sessions, selecting and training a moderator, determining an incentive or reward for participants, preparing any recordings or visuals that may be needed for each session, producing the pre-session questionnaire, and developing the questions to be used and included in the facilitator's guide.

In most situations, conference rooms are used or motel rooms are rented. For this study, a conference room of the College of Communications was reserved for use. A circular seating arrangement was used to promote informality and group interaction. It was also relatively easy to set up this room with four microphones and a reel-to-reel recorder for taping. The room's proximity to the radio station on campus made it readily accessible to the participants as well.

There is some disagreement on how to choose a moderator to conduct focus groups. Some research firms will insist that it is best to hire an organization which is capable and experienced in the running analysis of broadcast focus groups. On the other hand, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) research department has determined that in situations where financial resources are a decisive factor in conducting any form of research, individual stations could conduct these studies themselves. As was stated earlier, this "do-it-yourself" characteristic of focus groups is one of the most attractive things about them for broadcasters. In such cases, facilitators should proceed with an added concern for objectivity in the selection, interviewing and analysis of the results from these groups (Balon, 1981, Pt. 1).

In the WUTK study, the program director served as the facilitator for the group sessions. His training and

experience in small group dynamics and in counseling helped to offset subjective bias in the sessions, and his knowledge of the format modifications at the station helped with the development of the questions for the pre-session questionnaire and for the interviews themselves.

The pre-session questionnaires that are often used, ask background information about the informants and draw out their more private responses. They are used to classify the group members demographically and to check on the oral comments given by informants in the discussion period. By asking questions on a questionnaire before the discussion begins, one can assess the candor of comments made during the interview. A set of scales may be included, asking informants to quantify their opinions.

In the study of WUTK, a nine question pre-session questionnaire was developed and a set of Likert scales was produced on sixteen different statements of opinion concerning their music preferences and WUTK (see Appendix E).

Finally, as an incentive for participation, the station offered each participant their choice of a promotional album from the station's collection.

Conducting The Sessions

Generally a focus group interview begins with some shared experience so that the individuals have a common base

from which to start the discussion. Informants may listen to or view a tape, examine a product, or simply be asked to share an answer to a question on the pre-session questionnaire. In this study, each session began by asking the informants to share their response to the pre-session question concerning their favorite type or kind of rock music and the artists who represent that type for them. Since the facilitator does not need to adhere strictly to the questions prepared for the session, this was a good way to elicit a variety of responses and make the informants feel comfortable with the other participants. Nevertheless, a verbatim introduction was prepared and used for each session to set the tone for the purpose of the discussion along with the questions already outlined above which guided the remainder of each oral discussion (see Appendix F).

In the WUTK study described here, three sessions were conducted on three successive evenings from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. The interviews were held on a Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in February, and participants were given a choice of which night to attend when they were telephoned. The times and nights were decided upon by scheduling around conflicts with home basketball games, local concerts, and popular television programs.

After conducting the sessions, it remains the task of the researcher to analyze the data and prepare a summary

report. This will be the subject of the next chapter of this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This chapter represents the final procedural step in focus group research: analyzing the data and preparing a written summary report. The responses from each of the three group sessions in the study of WUTK were transcribed from the original audio tapes of the sessions. The comments were scanned, and the number and tone of the responses, as well as the common elements and trends among all the groups were noted.

This chapter begins with a summary of the demographic and quantitative data obtained from the pre-session questionnaires from all the informants, and then presents the results of each group interview session. The final section of the chapter is a summary of the findings of the interviews, noting the common elements and the differences among the three focus groups.

Pre-session Questionnaire

The questionnaire used for the study of WUTK solicited basic demographic information from the informants. It also included twenty-five other items: nine questions concerning general radio listening habits, music preferences, and

station image associations, and sixteen evaluation statements of WUTK programming in a Likert-type scale format (see Appendix E). The questionnaire was pre-tested with a random group of twelve respondents.

The results of the questionnaire compared favorably with the most recent telephone survey done in the Spring of 1986. Over 90% of informants in the focus groups said they listen to radio two hours or more every day. Listenership was spread evenly throughout all dayparts, with most radio listening taking place at home. Over 80% of the respondents listed "rock" as the music format they listen to most on radio. WUTK was named most often as their favorite station in Knoxville, the station with the widest variety of music, and the station perceived as improving the most in recent months.

When the informants were asked to describe the kind of rock music they enjoyed most, a variety of responses were offered. Some responses were expressed positively; others were expressed in negative terms. The following is a listing of the different responses given:

- alternative, progressive, independent music
- up-beat with strong vocals, pop-rock, electro-pop
- post-punk, modern, new wave, hardcore punk
- jazz or bluesy rock
- clean guitar-based rock, leading edge rock
- new unfamiliar artists and songs, diverse

- heavy metal
- high energy, off-beat
- socially significant, stirring lyrics
- college new music rock
- regional, new Southern rock
- classic rock

Negative descriptions included the following:

- not what is on commercial radio, non-top 40
- no heavy metal music
- not formula music
- not acid, hard rock or punk

Descriptions mentioned most often were alternative, progressive and non-top 40 music. Informants generally preferred a rock style somewhere between pop, top-40 music and music with continual harsh-sounding vocals and instrumentation. WUTK listeners largely preferred to hear new artists and new songs and a diverse mix of the latest rock music available.

Divergent opinions were expressed with regard to so-called "heavy metal" and "punk" music, some preferring these styles, others rejecting them. Both sides were strongly opinionated when it came to these music descriptions.

When the informants were asked to name three artists or groups that represent the type of rock music they liked best, over eighty different artists were mentioned (see

Appendix E). All the descriptions of the music listed above were reflected in the artists that were named.

The last of the initial nine questions asked for reasons why respondents listened or did not listen to WUTK. There were basically six reasons, listed in no particular order here, why informants listened to WUTK:

1. The variety of the music; no repetition of the same songs; good playlist.
2. To hear unestablished artists and new music.
3. Tired of top-40 radio; dislike of other Knoxville stations.
4. The non-commercial nature of WUTK.
5. To hear specialty music programs (e.g. blues, jazz).
6. The college-oriented focus of WUTK.

There were three reasons why informants did not listen to WUTK:

1. Technical reason: weak signal of the station could not be received.
2. Promotional reason: informants never thought about trying the station and were not sure where it was located on the radio dial.
3. Personal reason: preference for more popular, commercial music.

In regard to the Likert scale used in the questionnaire (see Appendix E), every informant in all three groups agreed that WUTK played a good variety of artists and styles of

rock music. All but one respondent felt that WUTK should exclude top-40 hits from its music rotation, and ninety-two percent of respondents felt that WUTK's music should reflect more new, progressive and alternative rock music. Ninety-six percent said they were more interested in WUTK introducing them to new artists and various rock music styles. Almost ninety percent said they wanted WUTK's music programming to emphasize songs that were new and unfamiliar to them. Over ninety percent of the informants liked the fact that WUTK played songs from current albums that they could not hear anywhere else in Knoxville. Every respondent said they liked the specialty shows on WUTK, and all but one agreed that they would listen to an album hour on WUTK, featuring new album releases.

News programming also received high ratings by the respondents, with all but one agreeing that WUTK does a good job of covering the news, events and issues on the U.T. campus. Seventy-eight percent of the informants liked five minutes of news and sports at the top of each hour. This rating was lower than the results on the other news questions, but still indicated a very positive response. The results of the questionnaire were largely reflected in the group interviews themselves. The results of each group session follows.

Results From Group One Interview

As stated in the last chapter, group one consisted of eleven informants, seven males and four females. This was the largest of the three groups in this evaluative study of WUTK.

The fact that WUTK plays a good variety of new music, and is an alternative to the repetitive formats of commercial stations in the Knoxville market was given as the greatest strength and most positive element of WUTK's programming. Group one liked the fact that one could listen all day and not hear the same song twice. They also felt that the station provided an excellent opportunity for students to receive on-air experience, and this was viewed as a real positive contribution to their education in broadcasting. In general, they liked the announcers' delivery because they were personable, not overly slick or obnoxious, and because they provided variety by not all sounding the same, or coming from the same "announcing mold." This group also mentioned the non-commercial nature of WUTK as a strength, as well as the playing of local bands, informing the audience of where to hear live music locally, and letting the audience know of various University of Tennessee events.

Weaknesses of WUTK that group one would change included its low signal strength and its lack of a request line for listeners. They would like to see a longer broadcast day,

particularly later hours at night, even through the use of automative programming. They also expressed an option for more non-broadcast students who really like radio and music to be allowed air shifts at the station. The group felt that students in classes forced to be announcers showed less commitment and enthusiasm for the station and the music and, therefore, the station's "sound" suffered. They also wondered if the station was controlled by a select few, who made all the music and programming decisions. They felt that more diversity was needed at the station, and that announcers should be given more flexibility in choosing songs from the rotation. In addition, it was suggested that turntables be placed in the on-air studio so announcers could play some "classic" rock and bring in albums they like that conform to the format. The group also emphasized the identification of songs, artists and albums regularly since many are not readily known to listeners.

When asked about their opinions on WUTK's specialty shows, most felt that one hour shows were too short and airing them at midnight was too late for many listeners to enjoy them. They also preferred "live" shows so that listeners could call and get information about the artists, albums and record labels. Shows that were suggested for the future were a hard rock, "heavy metal" show, a "new age" music show, an all "new wave" show, a fifteen minute comedy

show on Sunday nights, radio drama, and a psychedelic show featuring album cuts from the past.

Other suggestions on the programming of the station included sponsorship of a free concert on campus, and live music in Knoxville. The format was judged as being good as it is, and it was agreed that the music should not be up to each announcer's whim. However, to give the format more variety, announcers could write up their list of songs to be played before their airshift for review and suggestions by the station's staff. A move to using records on the air at times could also give the format more variety. A final suggestion on music was the implementation of a "2 for Tuesday" feature, playing two consecutive songs from the same artist on Tuesdays. "Campus Voice Encounter" (a five minute syndicated interview program) and "Rock Calendar" (a chronicle of music history events) were seen as good music features that should be continued. Some informants suggested inserting short comedy bits throughout each day's programming.

Opinions of group one on news programming suggested that news every hour on the hour was too frequent and encouraged the repetition of the same stories all day. It was acknowledged that most students get news and sports information from the Daily Beacon, the on-campus newspaper. Therefore, WUTK news should concentrate on late-breaking news not available in the Beacon. It was also noted that

some actualities were of poor quality, unnecessary to the story at hand, or used too often throughout the day. Finally, it was stated that the slow delivery of some news announcers made news seem boring.

There were a variety of campus issues offered for WUTK information programming. Better cooperation between the Student Government Association (SGA) and WUTK was a prime topic. It was suggested that a representative from SGA, the Academic Council and the Residence Hall Association serve as liaisons to the station's news department. Reports on the activities of these groups and others could be scheduled regularly as top-of-the-hour news segments. Other segments like "Campus Beat" (a listing of daily events on campus), editorials/rebuttals, and reports from the Chancellor's office were possible options also offered. It was also suggested that a popular columnist from the Daily Beacon could be invited to host a call-in talk show as a forum for student opinions on campus issues of interest. Other issues raised by group one informants were the campus parking problem, the use of students' tuition and student affairs monies, and drug testing on campus.

Results From Group Two Interview

As stated in chapter three, group two was made up of five participants, all males. This was the smallest but most homogeneous of all three groups in this study.

Responses from the group two interview regarding the strengths and positive elements of WUTK centered on the music programming of the station. Items mentioned were the variety of songs and types of rock music played, and the new music and unestablished artists that the audience can hear. A strength that was especially noted was the uniqueness of this album rock format for Knoxville which allows WUTK to break new ground that other stations later pick up on. The non-commercial nature of the station, the specialty shows, "Campus Beat" and the "Live Music Report" were also cited as positive aspects of the station's programming. This group also liked the fact that the station did not play old music listeners often already have in their own record/tape collections.

The main weakness of WUTK mentioned by group two informants was its weak signal which breaks up on Alcoa Highway and sometimes blurs into WUOT. Other things these informants would change included adding more hours to the broadcast day, especially on weekends, and making sure the sign-on time was consistent. They also suggested giving more weather forecasts in the morning and identifying new music more often. In general, group two informants

emphasized that the station's music programming should concentrate on new music not available on commercial stations in the area.

"Campus Voice Encounter" and "Rock Calendar" were cited as other important programming elements at the station. In regard to specialty shows, these respondents suggested more promotion was needed. Other shows recommended for the future included a pre-1975 music show, an "album hour," and live comedy recorded at the Funny Bone comedy club. They also suggested broadening the "Local Scene" to include regional talent as well as Knoxville artists.

Opinions of group two on news and information programming suggested that the news reports were often too repetitive for the long-term listener. However, they did like to hear some news on WUTK and liked it consistently at the top-of-the-hour. Some suggested having a "news magazine" type of show. Their critique of WUTK's sports reporting was that it was often too critical, destructive, and opinionated. Allowing others to air an alternative opinion on the University of Tennessee sports program or having a rebuttal on sports editorials was suggested to add balance to the sports programming. A final comment requested better reports on home game sports scores and letting the audience know on a regular basis when tickets to sporting events go on sale on campus.

Suggestions for campus issues that WUTK programming might address were mandatory drug testing, student funding, and allowing blacks in fraternities and sororities. Informants in group two also expressed negative comments on the current 8 a.m. time slot for a ten minute public affairs program.

Results From Group Three Interview

Group three had eight participants: 6 males and 2 females. This group seemed to be more vocal and opinionated than the first 2 groups. Many of the respondents here have been listeners to the station throughout the format modifications of the last two years. As a whole, their main concerns focused on the music programming of the station. They saw WUTK targeting an audience that wants an alternative in music radio. The feeling was that there are enough commercial stations in Knoxville to satisfy the majority tastes of listeners.

As in the previous sessions, the variety of new music and its alternative nature were seen as the greatest strengths of WUTK's programming. The midnight specialty shows, "Live Music Report" and promotional giveaways were also dimensions of the programming cited as positive elements. The non-commercial status was again offered as a

plus, as was campus news and information on University of Tennessee events.

When asked about weaknesses of the station they would change, there were a number of strong responses given. Many felt that the station was attempting to please too many people by adding certain artists to the rotation they considered overplayed and too commercial for WUTK's playlist.

These informants also felt strongly that the announcers need to have more positive attitudes on the air. To many in this group, the announcers gave the impression that they were forced to be on the air and would prefer not to be. There was a lack of spontaneity and enthusiasm. It was felt that perhaps department requirements made announcing a burden to many students and "took the fun out of it." There was a concern that many students had lost the idea of seeing their on-air shifts on WUTK as a privilege. A related concern was the lack of music knowledge in the announcers which seemed to affect the "personality" of the station. A "history of rock" course for new announcers was suggested as a way of introducing novices to the music and the format.

The irregular on-air schedule was again raised as a problem. Listeners found the erratic on-air, off-air times to be annoying and something that caused them to turn to other stations or sources of entertainment. These

respondents also preferred broadcasting later at night and through breaks in the school schedule.

When asked about other music improvements to the station's format, some suggested adding some old album cuts to the rotation. Some suggested jazz music in the mornings, or allowing students to bring in their own music for a special show. Regarding requests, call-ins could be gathered throughout the week and played at a special time. This might solve the problem of daily, on-going requests that cannot be found and played quickly on the air. A final suggestion was station sponsorship of live concerts on campus, emphasizing non-top 40 artists.

The main campus issue that was raised for WUTK's public affairs programming was the allocation of student funds. There was a concern for rising tuition costs and a feeling that too much money went to the university's sports program. There was also surprise and concern that no student funds were used for the support of WUTK as a campus radio station serving the University of Tennessee community.

Summary Of Findings

In general, the respondents in all three group interviews were loyal and often exclusive listeners to WUTK. They were listeners above average in their interest and knowledge of contemporary music, and in their openness to

new and unestablished musical trends. Because of these qualities, they were able to remain supportive of WUTK while it "found a hole" in the market and proceeded to "tear down the walls" of the format to broaden its appeal and fine-tune its programming niche. There were differences of opinion, however, on the format itself - some feeling it was quite diverse, others preferring more flexibility.

It was obvious that the alternative and new music aspect of WUTK's programming remained the single most attractive element to all the informants in this study. Music information features and specialty shows added to this uniqueness. Though the descriptions of rock music were varied, and many different artists were offered as examples, the alternative album rock music within a non-commercial setting was the main reason listeners tuned in and stayed with the station. This information compared favorably with the results from all three interview sessions as well as the information given in the pre-session questionnaires. This study helps to confirm that on this campus and in this market, such a format for WUTK is supported, has a place on the local radio dial, and actually serves the community.

Though the informants had different comments on the announcers at the station (e.g. group one being more positive, group three more negative), the study highlights the importance of announcers' knowledge of music, and their task of representing the station on the air to the audience.

Another positive aspect of the programming agreed upon in all three groups was the communication of University of Tennessee news and events. Generally speaking, the groups were pleased with the information programming, and felt it was an important contribution of the station to its audience and to the community. There was some preference for shorter newscasts or less frequent newscasts.

In the area of weaknesses, there was universal agreement on the need for an increase in power, since many students off campus and others in the target audience have difficulty receiving the station. Also, many agreed that they would like to see the station lengthen its broadcast hours at night and remain consistent with its sign-on and sign-off times. Groups one and three suggested adding some classic album cuts to the rotation.

Each group also asked that the identification of the music on the air be done on a consistent basis since so many of the artists, albums and songs are brand-new. All groups liked the specialty shows, though many thought they were too short, aired too late, and would be better if done live. Some good suggestions for future shows were noted.

A common trend was the satisfaction of informants with "Campus Voice Encounter," "Live Music Report" and "Rock Calendar."

In regard to campus issues, the three issues raised consistently by participants were the allocation of student

funds, the parking problem on campus, and the drug testing issue on campus. A number of people also encouraged greater cooperation between WUTK and existing groups and associations on campus. Finally, a call-in talk show was often cited as a way to address campus issues, hear student opinions, and increase the station's rapport with its audience.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis has outlined a research project designed to evaluate the radio programming of WUTK-FM, the campus radio station of the University of Tennessee, by listeners to the station. As the preceding chapters have shown, both current radio programming strategies and WUTK's own Policies and Procedures Manual emphasize the importance and need for research in order to make responsible and competitive programming decisions. Elements that have contributed to a greater need for ongoing research of audiences and programming efforts, and for data beyond numbers alone, include audience fragmentation, competition among radio stations, competition from emerging entertainment options such as cable and video cassettes, diverse programming formats in radio, an increasing number of AM and FM stations, and added competition to attract advertisers to a suitable target audience. As more extensive data are required concerning audiences and their opinions, qualitative research studies are taking on added importance. For many broadcasters today, focus group interviewing has become the preferred qualitative research methodology because it provides an in-house, low-cost way to gain more substantial information quickly.

This study has shown that the advantages of focus group research make it a viable option for all stations, especially those with limited staffs and budgets.

When students are the target audience to be interviewed, as in this study, prior planning is especially essential for success. Things like work and class schedules, social activities, popular television programs, and general apathy are obstacles to be overcome in conducting focus group sessions with students. For these reasons, it would be best to conduct focus groups at least once a year at WUTK to supplement telephone survey data gathered more regularly during the year.

As for the informants themselves, this study revealed that listeners to WUTK are very loyal to the station, many even exclusive listeners. In general, they are more knowledgeable of contemporary music trends, and more open to new artists and styles of music than the average student.

A major difficulty before this study was finding terms to describe the kind of rock music that WUTK listeners prefer to hear on radio. Both the responses given in the pre-session questionnaires and in the interviews themselves showed that the most-used description was "new rock music that is an alternative to top-40 formats."

Listeners in this study generally liked the way the present format has evolved over the last two years. They also responded favorably to the programming features such as

"Live Music Report," "Rock Calendar," "Campus Beat," and "Campus Voice Encounter."

Reasons given for listening to WUTK were: its new music format offers a greater variety of music; its non-commercial and college-oriented nature; specialty shows that highlight other types of music popular with the diverse University of Tennessee audience; and a general dissatisfaction with top-40 commercial radio.

Three reasons were given as to why some in WUTK's target audience do not listen to the station: many cannot pick up the station's low-power signal where they live; many students do not know about the station; some students prefer other contemporary formats.

In the following section, specific recommendations for future consideration by WUTK's management will be offered. These recommendations are suggested in light of the comments gathered from the respondents in the three focus groups in this study.

Recommendations

The following recommendations regarding the future of WUTK are offered because they seem to be reasonable responses to concerns voiced by informants in this study, and because they could be implemented quite easily with minimal expense to the station.

First of all, the problem of WUTK's weak signal is a technical one. The recommendation here is that a frequency search be conducted and that an application to the FCC for an increase in power be prepared and submitted for approval. This would allow all members of the university community to receive the station's signal. It would also enable the station to cover all of Knoxville, its city of license, with a format otherwise unavailable in the area.

Secondly, it was noted that many members of the university community are not aware of the station's existence. This basic problem could be solved by an increase in promotional efforts. The station seems to need some high visibility on campus. The station could make sure that its banner is displayed at every home football game, basketball game (both men and women), and at major social events on campus, such as live concerts. This would give the community a greater awareness of the station, identify the station with campus activities, and would not cost anything beyond some time, effort, and commitment from the station's staff. Perhaps a practicum student in promotion could coordinate this type of project.

Another way to increase station awareness would be to prepare a promotional flyer to be included in the packets given to new students during summer orientations. This could be prepared during spring quarter and would only cost the price of printing. In the fall, a similar flyer could

be put in every student mail box on campus. This would serve to give the students an awareness of the station as freshmen and at the start of the school year. Another popular promotional item of more expense would be station bumper stickers. These have not been available for over two years, and there is a need for one to promote the "Album 90" logo of WUTK.

Another easy promotion for the station would be to set aside one or two days at the station at the beginning of each quarter for student tours of the station's facilities. Many students do not know where the station is located, and have never been inside a radio station. Again, this would serve to get the station in the consciousness of its audience.

Sponsorship of a free concert on campus, perhaps in conjunction with the Campus Entertainment Board, or live music at a local new music club would be another good promotion for the station, and one that was suggested by informants in this study.

Another recommendation from participants in this study was to lengthen the broadcast day of WUTK, especially at night. This could be implemented quite easily without much confusion. Perhaps WUTK's sign-off time could be moved from 1 a.m. to 2 a.m.

In regard to specialty shows on WUTK, informants felt they were too short (one hour), and would be better if done

live rather than pre-recorded on tape. Longer shows done live would be possible at the station. Live shows would increase the station's rapport with its audience. Adding an all-request show where requests from throughout the week would be played, or a regular shift each week designated and promoted as a request time would also increase communication between the station and its listeners. Since requests are generally not solicited at WUTK, such a time set aside for requests could satisfy this need for the audience in a manageable way.

Other types of music recommended for future specialty shows are New Age music, Heavy Metal, and a show featuring experimental, avant-garde music. It was also recommended here that the specialty show featuring local music be broadened to include more regional talent, rather than limiting itself to Knoxville artists.

Another recommendation is that a live call-in talk show be introduced into the programming. Such a show could address real issues on campus, stimulate discussion, and provide an outlet for diverse opinions in the university community. In addition, it would provide good promotional benefits for the station, and enhance the station's credibility and identity as a genuine service to the University of Tennessee community.

A recommendation on news programming would be to shorten the newscasts on WUTK and have them less often.

This study has shown that five minutes of news every hour on the hour is too frequent for a music station with student listeners. In addition, the focus on campus news can be emphasized by greater cooperation with representatives from the Student Government Association, Academic Council, Residence Hall Association, and Student Affairs office. These representatives could provide weekly summaries of their group's activities to WUTK's news department for inclusion in newscasts. This interdependence would heighten awareness of WUTK, and show it is involved with serving its target audience. It would be a first step in the station's goal to become more and more identified with its community.

To help announcers learn more about the music played on WUTK, it is recommended that a notebook containing record company promotional information on artists and albums be kept in the control room at all times as a reference for on-air personnel. This might help to replace the information that album sleeves generally provide when using records on the air.

Finally, two recommendations are suggested on program features. First, an album hour should probably be added to the format. This received positive support from all but one informant in this study. This feature was in the original programming of WUTK five years ago and seems to be a need once again. The feature could run at 9 p.m. each weekday, with a "classic" album offered on Saturday nights. Such a

feature would reinforce the album rock format of the station.

Secondly, the station should have the ability to play records on the air. Then new releases could be played on the day of arrival, and other music programming features could be added to the format, such as playing three songs in a row from a particular artist ("Three On Thursday"), or an hour (maybe at 12 noon) featuring the music of one artist ("Artist Showcase"). In any case, the capability of playing records over the air under special circumstances would give some flexibility, and allow for some new programming features that could broaden the format's appeal to WUTK's target audience.

Additional Research

As this study has already stated, programming for excellence in radio broadcasting is guided by ongoing research efforts with one's audience. WUTK's own Policy and Procedures Manual attests to the station's need for and commitment to research on a regular basis.

This study suggests six avenues for additional research for WUTK. The first recommendation is for a random sample telephone survey of the general student population with questions based on the results of this focus group study. One of the advantages of focus group research, as we have

seen in chapter three, is that it provides qualitative responses that can suggest new questions for survey research. This focus group project could be a pilot study for future quantitative research on music and programming.

A second opportunity for additional research would be a listener panel study. Informants from this focus group study could be used again for long range feedback that a panel study can provide. In this way, feelings about future modifications and additions to WUTK's format could be monitored through the station's relationship with specific listeners over time. This could even develop into a kind of student advisory group for the station.

A third suggestion for future research would be conducting focus group research itself at least once a year to supplement and guide regular survey research conducted by the station. In this study, the facilitator heard many expressions of thanks from the informants for conducting such a study. Some misunderstandings and false rumors about the station's programming were put to rest, and the informants felt that the station had taken a major step in hearing their opinions about the station. This was undoubtedly as important for the station's image and relationship with its audience as the actual information that was gathered. Those who attended the sessions left them feeling better about the station as a whole.

Another source of music research would be to call local record stores adjacent to campus to monitor sales of top albums and requests for albums heard exclusively on WUTK. These call-outs could even be done every week at little expense to the station. This would help the program director keep in touch with the record-buying habits of students.

Other quantitative research could be done on WUTK's listeners as well. Do more graduate students listen to WUTK than undergraduates? Are seniors more likely to enjoy WUTK's format than freshmen? Are students in certain majors more likely to be listeners to WUTK than others? What is the percentage of WUTK listeners who are not students? These are some of the questions future audience research could answer.

A final source of additional research would be to designate a certain hour or hours each week when the program or music director could be available to take calls from listeners about the station. The time could be promoted on the air all week. Again, this would be no financial burden to the station. It would also have a number of advantages for WUTK.

First of all, it would be another opportunity for communication with the station's listeners. Secondly, it would be unique to this radio market. Rarely can the average listener call a station anywhere and give his or her

opinion on anything about the station directly to the program director. Third, it would show listeners that the station really cares about what they think, and that their opinions would be considered when making future programming decisions. Finally, it would be a unique way of touching the audience and soliciting some response from listeners. Some interesting opinions and ideas might be generated for other research or programming possibilities.

In conclusion, this case study of the application of focus group research to an evaluation of radio programming by listeners of WUTK-FM can serve as a guide and model for qualitative research, as the need for such in-depth knowledge of listeners and their opinions increases in the world of broadcasting.

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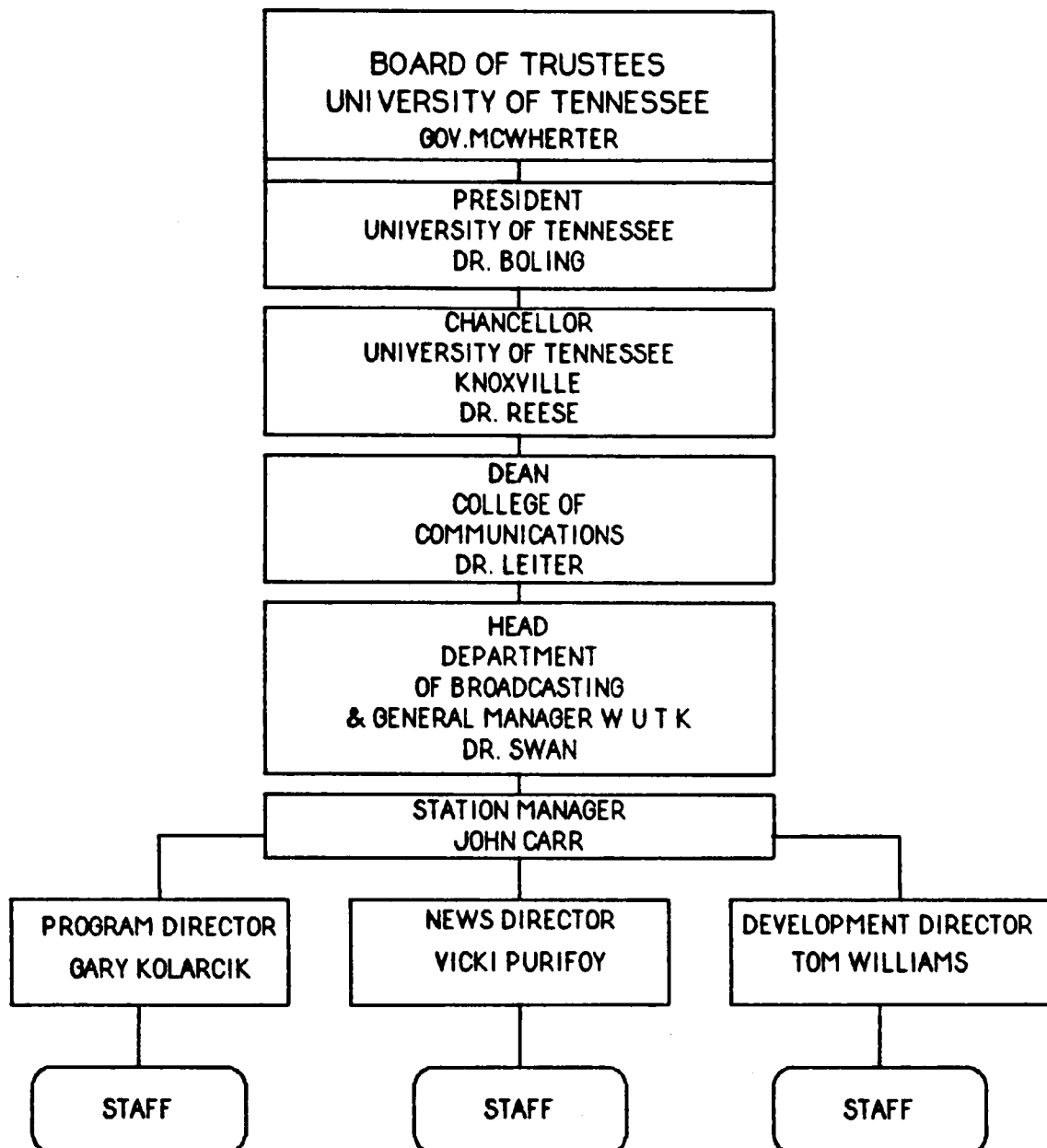
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APPENDICES

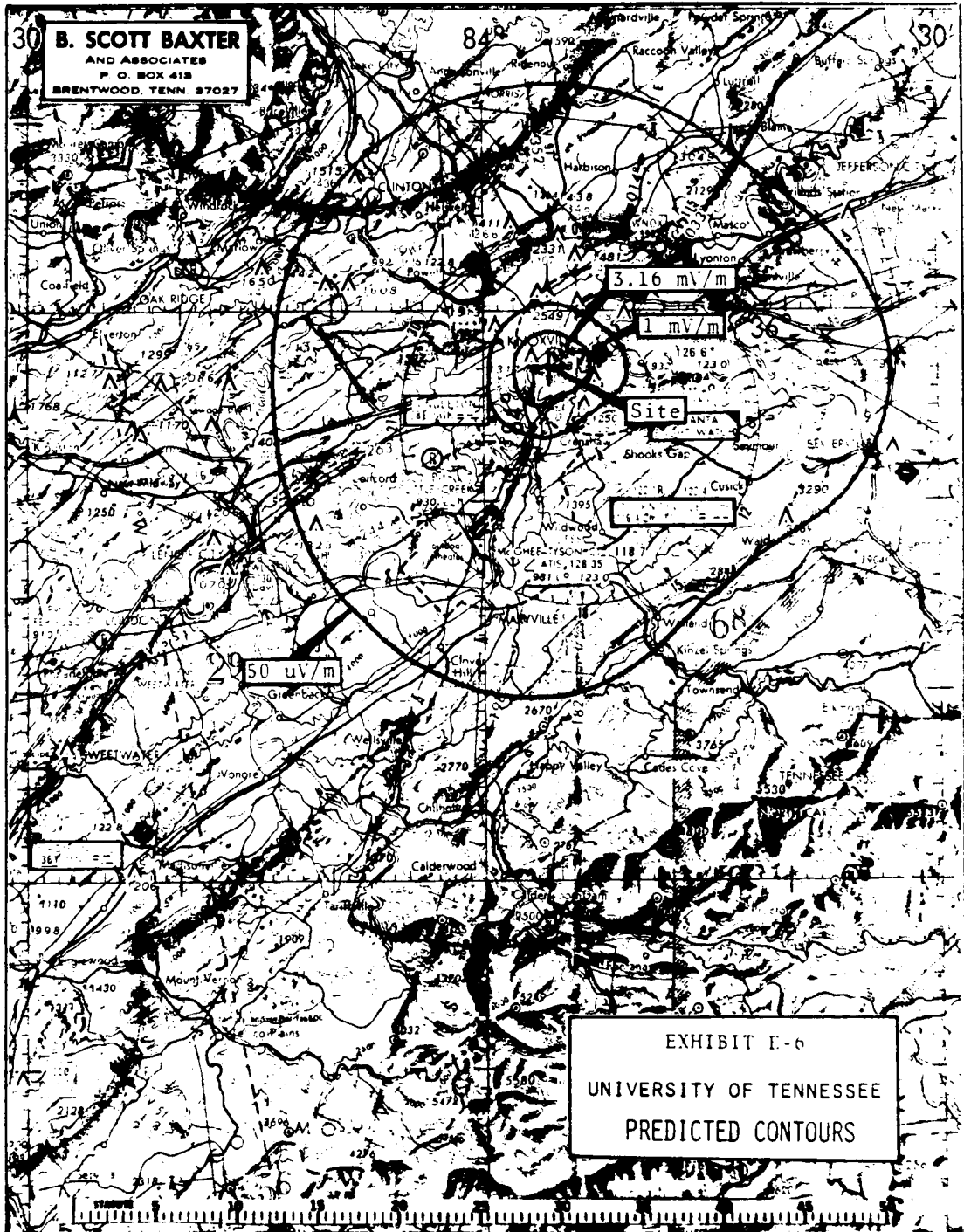
APPENDIX A

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF WUTK-FM



A/O 20 JANUARY 1987

COVERAGE MAP OF WUTK-FM



APPENDIX B

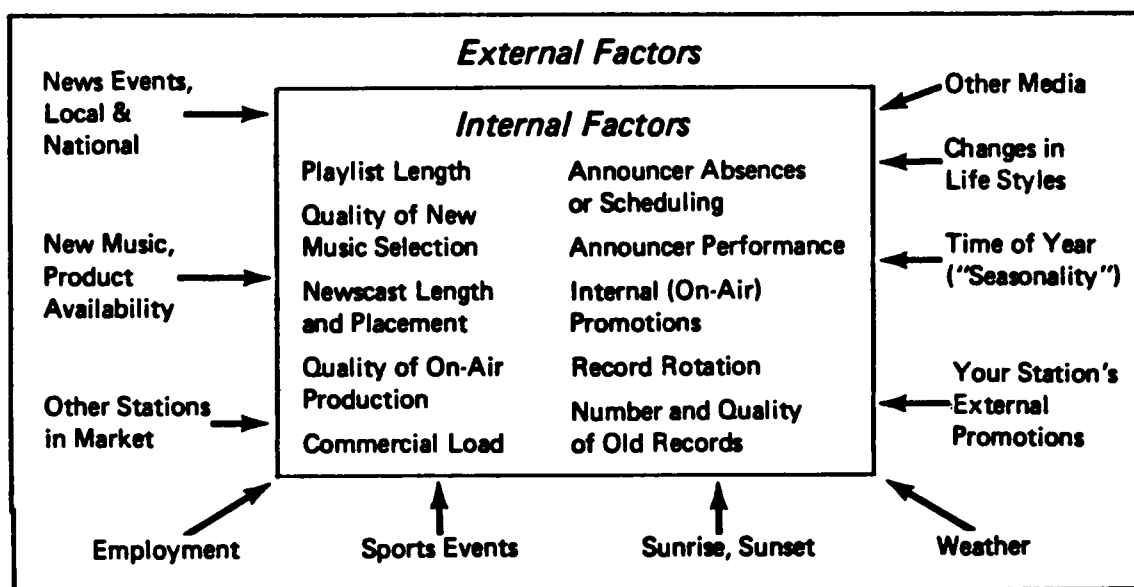
KNOXVILLE RADIO FORMATS

<u>Call Letters</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Format</u>
<u>FM STATIONS</u>		
WUTK	90.3	ALBUM ROCK
WKCS	91.1	ADULT CONTEMPORARY
WUOT	91.9	CLASSICAL (NPR)
WLIL	93.5	COUNTRY
WKNF	94.3	SOFT ADULT CONTEMPORARY
WTNZ	95.3	CONTEMPORARY
WEZK	97.5	EASY LISTENING
WJFC	99.3	COUNTRY
WOKI	100.3	TOP 40
WMYU	102.1	ADULT CONTEMPORARY
WIMZ	103.5	ROCK
WQLA	104.9	COUNTRY
WNKX	105.5	HIGH ENERGY ROCK
WIVK	107.7	COUNTRY
<u>AM STATIONS</u>		
WRJZ	620	CHRISTIAN
WLIL	730	COUNTRY
WIVK	850	COUNTRY
WKXV	900	GOSPEL
WSEV	930	COUNTRY
WWGR	960	SOUTHERN GOSPEL
WNOX	990	COUNTRY
WBZW	1040	CLASSIC OLDIES
WIMZ	1240	ROCK
WATO	1290	ADULT CONTEMPORARY
WKGn	1340	URBAN CONTEMPORARY
WYSH	1380	COUNTRY
WGAP	1400	COUNTRY-WESTERN
WMDR	1470	CONTEMPORARY POP
WJFC	1480	COUNTRY, GOSPEL
WITA	1490	CHRISTIAN
WSKT	1580	RELIGION

Material taken from "Showtime," found in Sunday editions of The Knoxville News-Sentinel, Knoxville, TN.

APPENDIX C

MODEL OF A STATION'S COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT



Material taken from Research Guidelines For Programming Decision Makers (1977), Beltsville, MD: Arbitron.

APPENDIX D

WUTK-FM PLAYLIST



H E A V Y

June, 1987

REPLACEMENTS
DASH RIP ROCK
HUNTERS AND COLLECTORS
U 2
R.E.M.
THE COLOURFIELD
THE BEARS
DIVINE HORSEMEN
WIRE
THE CULT
THE NEIGHBORHOODS
WILLIAMS BROTHERS
MASON RUFFNER
XTC
BALAAM AND THE ANGEL
SCRUFFY THE CAT
PETER & THE TEST TUBE BABIES
GO-BETWEENS
ALISON MOYET
FLESHTONES
D.C. 3
SUZANNE VEGA
HUSKER DU
GREEN ON RED
PRIVATE DOMAIN
CLUB WIG
THE LONG RYDERS
Various
THE SMITHS
OMAR AND THE HOWLERS
PASTELS
BOB PFEIFER
ANGRY SAMOANS
PERSONAL EFFECTS
T'PAU
JOHNNY & THE HEADHUNTERS
ERASURE
WALL OF VOO DOO
THE LORRIES
I.Q.

Pleased To Meet Me
Dash Rip Rock
Living Daylight(EP)
The Joshua Tree
Dead Letter Office
Deception
The Bears
Middle Of The Night
The Ideal Copy
Electric
Reptile Men
Two Stories
Gypsy Blood
Skylarking
The Greatest Story Ever Told
Tiny Days
Peter & the Test Tube Babies
Tallulah
Raindancing
Fleshtones Vs. Reality
You're Only As Blind...
Solitude Standing
Warehouse: Songs and Stories
The Killer Inside Me
Private Domain
Club Wig
Two-Fisted Tales
Best of the Radio Tokyo Tapes
Louder Than Bombs
Hard Times In The Land Of Plenty
Up For A Bit With The Pastels
After Words
Yesterday Started Tomorrow
Mana Fiesta
T'pau
Johnny and the Headhunters
The Circus
Happy Planet
Crawling Mantra
Nomzamo

Sire
688
I.R.S.
Island
I.R.S.
Chrysalis
Primitive Man
SST
Enigma
Sire
Emergo
WB
CBS
Geffen
Virgin
Relativity
Rock Hotel
BigTime
Columbia
Emergo
SST
A & M
WB
Mercury-PG
Chameleon
Mustang
Island
Chameleon
Sire
Columbia
BigTime
Passport/Jem
PVC
Restless
Virgin
Dangerous
Sire
I.R.S.
Homestead
Squawk-PG

M E D I U M

PRIMITONS
Various
THRASHING DOVES
SALEM 66
MEKONS
STYLE COUNCIL
WEBB WILDER & THE BEATNECKS
CHRIS ISAAK
STAGE DOLLS
MEAT PUPPETS
NYLONS

Happy All The Time
The Towers Of New London Vol.II
Bedrock Vice
Frequency And Urgency
Honky Tonkin
The Cost Of Loving
It Came From Nashville
Chris Isaak
Commandos
Mirage
Happy Together

What Goes On
Vinyl Siding
A & M
Homestead
Twin/Tone
Polydor-PG
Racket
WB
BigTime
SST
Open Air

P103 Andy Holt Tower,

The University of Tennessee,

Knoxville, Tennessee 37996-0115

(615) 974-8897

DANNY WILSON
PSEUDO ECHO
JR. GONE WILD
NEW MODEL ARMY
INTIMATE STRANGERS
THE NEATS
ROBERT SEIDLER
EDDIE AND THE TIDE
THE OTHER ONES
RICHARD MARX
FUZZBOX
PAISLEY JUNGLE
THE FOUR ONES
JUDE COLE
KRAYOLAS
CABO FRIO
PHIL MANZANERA
THE STEPFORD HUSBANDS
THE LINES
CATHEADS
BILL LLOYD
HEAVEN 17
CROSSFIRE CHOIR
FATAL FLOWERS
DONNER PARTY
FRONTIER THEORY
THE ENDMEN
FIRETOWN
TRUE WEST
NOVA
INVISIBLE INK
TIM FEEHAN
NATHALIE ARCHANGEL

Meet Danny Wilson
Love An Adventure
Less Art More Pop
Poison Street (EP)
Charm
Crash At Crush
Cig Sisters
Looking For Adventure
The Other Ones
Richard Marx
We've Got A Fuzzbox...
Paisley Jungle
The Four Ones (EP)
Jude Cole
Dead End Life
Cabo Frio
Guitarissimo
New Ways Of Seeing
Will You Still Love Me...
Hubba
Feeling The Elephant
Pleasure One
Crossfire Choir
Younger Days
Donner Party
Atlantic
Beautiful Track Home
In The Heart Of The Heart Country
Hand Of Fate
Nova
Lite Up The Stereo
Tim Feehan
Nathalie Archangel

Virgin
RCA
B.Y.O.
Capitol
I.R.S.
Coyote
Hill Avenue
Atco
Virgin
Manhattan
Geffen
My Grain
Inner Landscapes
WB
Box
Zebra
E'G
Cryptovision
Sideman
Restless
Throbbing Lobster
Virgin
Passport/Jem
Atlantic
Cryptovision
Top
Petroleum By-Products
Atlantic
C D
Indigo
Stain
Scotti
Columbia

L I G H T

AGE OF CHANCE
JOHN SCOFIELD
50/50
WOLFGANG PRESS
BELOUIS SOME
SPEAR OF DESTINY
FLESH EATERS
CLIVE PIG
SLICKAPHONICS
RED KROSS
RHYTHM PIGS
THE FIENDS
JON ASTLEY
BRUCE HORNSBY & THE RANGE
HUNTER
YELLOWJACKETS
Various
BUDDY SYSTEM
ACOUSTIC ALCHEMY
HULA
LYON IN WINTER
LIONS AND GHOSTS
STEVE JONES
CALAMITIES
THE ART OF NOISE
LIVING DOLLS

Crush Collision
Blue Matter
Heart Like A Rock
Big Sex
Let It Be With You-12"
Outland
Greatest Hits-Destroyed By Fire
A Sense Of The Size Of The World
Humatonic Energy
Neurotica
Choke On This
The Fiends Present: Gynecology
Everyone Loves The Pilot...
Live-The Way It Is Tour
Dreams Of Ordinary Men
Four Corners
Posh Hits, Vol. I
Go Back To Hollywood
Red Dust And Spanish Lace
Voice
As Winter Falls
Mary Goes Round
Mercy
Calamities
Dragnet - 12"
Emotional Parade

Virgin
Gramavision
Rockduster
4 AD
Capitol
Virgin
SST
Hopewell
Blue Heron
BigTime
Mordam
Passport/Jem
Atlantic
RCA
Polydor-PG
MCA
Posh Boy
Chameleon
MCA
Red Rhino
Cryptovision
EMI
Gold Mountain-MCA
Posh Boy
Chrysalis
Fine Line

APPENDIX E

PRE-SESSION QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME _____ SEX: M or F CLASS _____

AGE _____ MARITAL STATUS: Married Single RACE _____

WHERE DO YOU LIVE WHILE ATTENDING THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE?

___ in a residence hall ___ at home with parents ___ other

___ in a fraternity house ___ rent a house

___ in an apartment ___ own a house or condominium

1. During an average day, about how many hours do you spend listening to the radio at home, in a car and at work?

___ less than 2 hours ___ 2-3 hours ___ over 3 hours

2. When do you listen to radio most often?

___ morning ___ afternoon ___ early evening ___ late evening

3. Where do you listen to radio most often?

___ home ___ car ___ work ___ other

4. What kind of music do you listen to most on the radio?

___ classical ___ country ___ easy listening ___ jazz

___ rock ___ urban contemporary ___ other

5. If "rock" is your favorite kind of music, describe the kind or type of rock music you like best?

6. Please name three (3) artists or groups that represent the type of rock music you like most.

7. What is your favorite radio station in the Knoxville area? _____
Why?

8. The station that plays the widest variety of music in Knoxville is _____.

The station getting better lately is _____.

The station going downhill lately is _____.

9. Do you listen to WUTK-FM, ALBUM 90, the radio station of U.T.'s Department of Broadcasting?

If yes, why?

If not, why not?

EVALUATION SCALE

1. WUTK plays a good variety of artists and styles of rock music.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
2. WUTK should play more top-40 hits.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
3. WUTK should exclude top-40 hits heard on commercial rock stations.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
4. WUTK should continue to emphasize the best songs from current rock albums.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
5. WUTK's music should reflect more popular, mainstream rock music.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
6. WUTK's music should reflect more new, progressive or alternative rock music.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
7. I am more interested in WUTK playing artists that are most popular and familiar to me.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
8. I am more interested in WUTK introducing me to new artists and various rock music styles.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
9. I am more interested in WUTK playing songs that are most popular and familiar to me.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
10. I like the fact that WUTK plays other songs from current albums besides the top-40 hits.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
11. WUTK keeps me in touch with things going on on the U.T. campus.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
12. WUTK informs me of the news events of the day.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
13. I like five (5) minutes of news and sports at the top of each hour on WUTK.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
14. In general, WUTK does a good job of covering the news, events and issues on the U.T. campus.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
15. I would listen to an album hour on WUTK, featuring new album releases.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___
16. In general, I like the specialty shows on WUTK that feature other kinds of music.
strongly agree ___ agree ___ disagree ___ strongly disagree ___

DEMOGRAPHICS FROM PRE-SESSION QUESTIONNAIRE

GROUP ONE: eleven informants - 7 males; 4 females.

Classification: 4 seniors; 2 juniors; 1 sophomore;
2 graduate students; 1 U.T. staff;
1 non-student.

Age Groups: 17-20 (2); 21-24 (5); 25-30 (3); 31-35 (1).

Marital status: single (8); married (2); divorced (1).

Race/nationality: all caucasian.

Residence: on campus (5); off campus (6).

GROUP TWO: five informants - all males.

Classification: 1 senior; 1 junior; 1 graduate student;
2 non-students.

Age Groups: 17-20 (0); 21-24 (3); 25-30 (1); 31-35 (1).

Marital status: single (3); married (2).

Race/nationality: all caucasian.

Residence: on campus (0); off campus (5).

GROUP THREE: eight informants - 6 males; 2 females.

Classification: 4 seniors; 1 junior; 1 sophomore;
1 graduate student; 1 non-student.

Age Groups: 17-20 (1); 21-24 (4); 25-30 (1); 31-35 (2).

Marital status: single (6); married (1); divorced (1).

Race/nationality: all caucasian

Residence: on campus (2); off campus (6).

ARTIST PREFERENCE LIST

The Smiths
Bodeans
The Cure
The Housemartins
Simply Red
Suzanne Vega
R.E.M.
The Call
Stevie Ray Vaughan
The Firm
Dire Straits
Bob Marley
Husker Du
The Allman Brothers
Johnny Winter
George Thorogood
Van Halen
Bob Seger
The Rolling Stones
Wynton Marsalis
Motley Crue
Aerosmith
Led Zeppelin
Muddy Waters
Circle Jerks
Don Dixon
Timbuk 3
X
The Kinks
Talking Heads

General Public
Elvis Costello
Guadalcanal Diary
UB 40
Fine Young Cannibals
Judas Priest
Fear
Bruce Springsteen
The Cars
Ric Ocasek
Madonna
Roxy Music
The Replacements
Cocteau Twins
Style Council
Everything But The Girl
Swimming Pool Q's
The Smithereens
Steve Winwood
Kate Bush
The Cult
The Beatles
Peter Gabriel
Modern English
Flock of Seagulls
Paul Simon
Robyn Hitchcock & the
Egyptians
Benjamin Orr
Hunters and Collectors

APPENDIX F

TELEPHONE RECRUITMENT FOR FOCUS GROUPS

Hello, I'm _____ and I'm calling from WUTK on the U.T. campus. We're conducting a study of the WUTK audience. We'd like to invite you to participate in a small group discussion to evaluate WUTK's programming, and to tell us your preferences for radio listening. The discussions will last about ninety minutes, and we'll be holding three different groups: one next Monday evening, another on Tuesday evening, and a third on Wednesday evening. Each session will begin at 6:45 p.m. and will be held in room P-105 in Andy Holt Tower on campus. After the session, you'll have the opportunity to choose a free album from our current promotional albums on hand. What evening next week would be most convenient for you to join us?

[Give directions - walking or driving]

We will begin promptly at 6:45 p.m. Thank you and we're looking forward to seeing you on _____ night.

Goodbye!

FACILITATOR GUIDE

INTRODUCTION:

We appreciate very much your willingness to come here this evening to help us. The subject of our research tonight is radio - what you like to hear on radio, how you use radio, and particularly, how you would evaluate the programming of campus radio station WUTK. Each of you was carefully selected from WUTK listeners to represent the typical needs and wants of the WUTK audience. Our purpose is to get as accurate and complete a picture of your radio listening behavior as possible.

PRESESSION QUESTIONNAIRE:

But first, as a means of knowing you better, we'd like you to fill out a short questionnaire. It will help us to clarify your general radio listening behavior and your preferences in music on radio. Please put your name on it, so that we'll know who was who. All your responses in this session will be used only for this study.

(PASS OUT QUESTIONNAIRES)

Let me say a word about the microphones. They are here so that we'll have a complete record of what you had to tell us. And this will help a lot as we report your feelings and opinions, show trends among your responses, and make recommendations regarding future research efforts and future programming decisions.

GROUP INTERVIEW:

Now it is time for some discussion about radio and music listening in general. In this discussion, the opinions and ideas of each of you are important. We are not looking for anything more than your ideas. There are no right or correct answers to the questions we'll ask. Each opinion is just as valid as any other. So don't hold back - and, at the same time, help the others in the group by not dominating the conversation. To get started, let's go around the table, each of us telling our name, our major area of study here at U.T. and the class we're in. I'll begin.

Now let's begin our discussion by referring back to the answers you wrote on the questionnaire for questions # 5 and # 6.

QUESTIONS:

1. What do you consider the strengths or most positive elements of WUTK's programming? What makes you listen?
2. What are weaknesses in WUTK's programming that you would change if you managed the station?
3. How could the music be improved on WUTK?
4. How do you feel about other music programming elements on WUTK, like specialty shows and music information features?
5. How do you feel about news and information programming (sports, editorials, issue-oriented programs) on WUTK? Should there be more or less?
6. What are some campus issues that WUTK could address through its programming?

VITA

Gary Richard Kolarcik was born in Passaic, New Jersey on January 26, 1950 and raised in the north Jersey area. He entered Siena College in Loudonville, New York in 1967 and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy in 1971. It was at Siena that his interest in broadcasting first materialized into work at radio station WVCR-FM.

He continued with announcing and production work at WIMO in Winder, Georgia from 1977-79 while teaching at St. Pius X High School in Atlanta.

In 1980 Gary received a Master of Arts degree in theology from the Washington Theological Union and was ordained a Franciscan priest in September of that year. While working at the University of Georgia in Athens, he continued his broadcasting endeavors at WUOG-FM, hosting a top-rated oldies program from 1982-85.

In September of 1985, he entered the graduate program in broadcasting at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and accepted an assistantship with the Department of Broadcasting as program and music director at WUTK-FM. He received his Master of Science degree in communications with a major in broadcasting in August, 1987, and was elected to Kappa Tau Alpha communications honor society.

His main interest is in helping broadcast stations to produce attractive programming that will address the issues, problems, and concerns of the local community.