Low Power FM Broadcasting:

A Survey Snapshot of the Field

by

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Abstract

Low Power FM Broadcasting:

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This study focuses on the current activities of licensed low power FM (LPFM) radio stations. Drawing attention to these stations reveals their struggles, successes and hopefully, adds listeners to their audience. It discusses the initiation of LPFM broadcasting in 2000 from two perspectives: regulatory and activist. A presentation of general station characteristics follows using evidence from a questionnaire delivered to seven hundred seventeen (717) stations. Two specific focuses of the questionnaire are listener feedback and localism. This study argues for expanded licensing by describing LPFM stations as an accessible community media that adds diversity to the marketplace of ideas.

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Introduction

This study considers Low Power Frequency Modulated (LPFM) broadcasting under the theoretical framework comprising community media. Community media involves community participants as planners, producers and performers *of* not *for* the community (Carpentier, 2003: 55). Another author defines community media as "Dialogue and interaction between senders and receivers where the roles of sender and receiver are blurred, shared or exchanged"(Lewis, 1984:4). In *Community and Civil Society*, originally published in German in 1877 and translated into English in 1957, Ferdinand Tonnies said that, "*Community* refers to a small, particular, informal, and personal type of primary group relationship. In contrast, *society* is characterized by large, universal, and formal relationships with impersonal ties"(Sampedro, 1998: 135). LPFM stations broadcast at between ten (10) and one hundred (100) watts and serve an audience within a five (5) to seven (7) mile radius from the transmitter (FCC, 2000). LPFM qualifies as a new arena to study community media by demonstrating the dynamics described above as well as following the localism in Tonnies' definition.

The importance of this study comes from the struggles of the past as well as the possibilities of the future. Freedom of speech and access to media are key to multiple perspectives contributing to a democratic society. In his opinion in the 1994 case *Turner Broadcasting v. FCC*, Justice Anthony Kennedy concluded, "Assuring the public has access to a multiplicity of information sources is a governmental purpose of the highest order"(McChesney, 2004, 237). Access to media is a multivariate pursuit. It can be "access to decision-making, access to more satisfactory or more appropriate media channels [or] access to production tools and access to adequate feedback systems"

(Berrigan,1977, 17). LPFM radio is an information source in communities and evidence later in this study provides examples of both access and feedback at stations.

The research base for LPFM practitioners is narrow because there is little evidence related to the who, what, where and how of LPFM broadcasting. Additionally, best practices and lessons learned cannot be generalized. "Compared to film, television, and newspapers, radio is a relatively under-researched and undervalued medium" (Jankowski, 2002, 10). This study hopes to provide research to show the value of LPFM broadcasting.

Organized data collection and dissemination allows an initial understanding of the plans and challenges emerging for LPFM broadcasters. With more information and studies like this one, LPFM broadcasters, their stakeholders and their constituents can continue to take steps to strengthen this field through evidence based practice. Ole R. Holsti wrote, "results take on meaning when we compare them with other attributes of the documents, with documents produced by other sources [or] with characteristics of the persons who produced the documents…"(Holsti, 1969, 5). Using Holsti's framework, radio programming functions as a text and this study must consider the structure of the environment in which it is created. Bernard Berelson sums up this effort in saying that "many fewer [researchers] have checked content against the communicator's own professed objectives" (Berelson, 1971, 44).

Near the end of Andrew Opel's 2004 book *Micro Radio and the FCC*, he wrote, "Who ends up with licenses and what they choose to broadcast are significant questions that deserve scholarly attention as this issue moves forward"(Opel, 2004, 148). This study seeks answers to the questions, "Who holds LPFM licenses?" and "What are

broadcasters doing with LPFM licenses?". The search followed a structured methodology

involving a questionnaire, and allows future researchers to build on the evidence

presented in their own studies related to LPFM.

History

LPFM radio is a new development in broadcasting policy. LPFM licensing began in 2000, partly in response to a decrease in local origination programming and an increase in the number of stations that a company can own in a market. At the time, Federal Communications Commission (FCC) chairman William Kennard described this situation in *The New York Times:*

> I am personally very concerned that we have more outlets for
> expression over the airwaves. I have made it a point of my tenure
> here as chairman to try to spotlight the fact that the broadcast
> industry is consolidating at a very rapid pace. And as a result of
> this, there are fewer opportunities of entry to minority groups,
> community groups, small businesses in general. And I'm very
> interested in hearing ideas to remedy the unfortunate closing of
> opportunities for a lot of new entrants"(Soley 1999, 131).

William Kennard stood at the forefront of a change in policy that had many different intentions and results. The history reported in this study looks at causes and effects from this regulatory perspective as well as from an activist perspective as LPFM policy making was developed.

In a January 27, 2000 report, the FCC said, "We believe that the LPFM service authorized in this proceeding will provide opportunities for new voices to be heard"(FCC, 2000). Interpreting *new voices* as *independent voices,* it follows that "our democracy is in crisis from the loss of independent voices serving as its watchdog… Ownership and Wall Street control is ultimately incapable of providing the community

connection and journalism essential to an independent press and the survival of democracy"(Blehen, 2002: 91). Consolidation would not affect these new stations because, according to the report, owners could only operate one station. The report goes on to state that "Our goal in creating a new LPFM service is to create a class of radio stations designed to serve very localized communities or underrepresented groups within communities"(4). On March 27, 2000, *The New York Times* reported that, "In response to thousands of requests to open such FM stations, the FCC intends to begin the licensing process"(Labaton, C1, 2000).

Up until this point I have laid out the history of LPFM licensing using government sources and accompanying discussion from newspapers and journals. Activists who microbroadcast provide an interesting interpretation of the beginning of LPFM licensing. As practitioners, these broadcasters are not synonymous with pirate broadcasters. Originally a term for broadcasts originating on boats offshore, "the term (pirate) has subsequently been applied to all unlicensed stations"(Soley, 53,1999). This study does not mention the perspectives of pirate broadcasters beyond this section because microbroadcasting illegally as a pirate is fundamentally different from this study's focus, legitimately licensed LPFM microbroadcasters. This is an important distinction when considering the LPFM field.

The term *microbroadcaster* is "a name unlicensed low power broadcasters prefer over *pirate*"(Riismandel, 2002, 425). Microbroadcasters report that LPFM licensing split their movement into two parts: individuals who wanted legal ways to continue broadcasting and individuals content to continue broadcasting illegally. Microbroadcasters had decisions to make:

Going off the air would be a sign of good faith now that the FCC

was considering a Low Power Service. Others felt that the only

reason they were making headway was by staying on the air and

keeping the pressure up. Moreover, there was the fear that

community support might wane if the stations had no presence. In

private email discussions several participants, myself included,

worried that if the movement was shown to be split, the opposition

would seek to divide us up and play us against each other"

(Coopman, 2000).

"Reckless," the on-air name of a DJ at Free Radio Austin (Texas), stated "A lot of

people in the microradio movement are going to take the inch that they've given us, and a

lot of people aren't. It's definitely a way to divide and conquer the movement"(Nichols,

2000). Other writers have discussed a co-optation of the microradio movement by

legalizing a segment of it (Brinson, 559, 2006). I argue that this fragmentation has

weakened microbroadcasting. In November 2006, microbroadcasters exist on both sides.

As an example of a station without a license, Radio Free Austin broadcasts at 100.1 FM.

The converse is KXPW-FM, a licensed LPFM station in nearby Georgetown, Texas. The

record of a FCC license for KXPW can be found at the FCC website

(http://www.fcc.gov/mb/audio/fmq.html).

Modification One of Two

In response to the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and National

Public Radio (NPR) the FCC revised the report initiating the LPFM service. NAB and

NPR positions will be described shortly, followed by microbroadcasters' position on these revisions. In an April 2, 2001 news release two modifications were made: "1) prescribe LPFM station third adjacent channel interference protection standards, and 2) prohibit any applicant from obtaining an LPFM station license if the applicant has engaged in the unlicensed operation of a station"(FCC, 2001). The effects of the first modification drastically cut the number of available frequencies. Using Austin, Texas as an example:

> By [the original] FCC rules, a station can be no closer to another station than the second-adjacent slot. Ideally, this would allow for as many as 16 new frequencies on the Austin dial. Under the new rules, however, microradio stations will have to be no closer than the third-adjacent slot, leaving only two open frequencies on Austin's FM dial (Nichols, 2000).

As an example of third-adjacent frequencies, 97.1 FM would only be available if the closest station was 96.5 FM or 97.7 FM. LPFM licensing had begun, but it was limited to a fraction of the frequencies initially possible. "Under this legislation pushed by the commercial broadcasters and passed by Congress, there were no new stations allowed in any of the top fifty urban markets"(Tridish, 2005: 301).

These two revisions were applauded by NPR and the NAB because, they claimed, LPFM stations caused interference with established stations. NAB President Edward Fritts presented their claim, "it would be folly to authorize hundreds of additional low-power stations that would surely cause additional interference"(McConnell, 1998, 19).

Becoming more firm, Edward Fritts planned to "review every option to undo the damage caused by low-power radio"(Slywka, 12, 2000). The two revisions reduced the available frequencies open to LPFM broadcasters and were hence seen as a move in the right direction for the NAB.

NPR acted in concert with the NAB. Agreement of these two groups meant that commercial and non-commercial broadcasters were against LFPM:

> Heavy lobbying by the National Association of
> Broadcasters and—to the dismay of advocates
> everywhere—National Public Radio, Congress enacted
> LPFM rules… reducing the potential number of LPFM
> frequencies by 75 percent. Central to NAB's dubious
> argument was that LPFM would create an "ocean of
> interference" with existing stations (Kim, 22, 2003).

The author of this article uses the word *dubious* because of another rationale behind NAB and NPR claims. "Commercial broadcasters were not opposed to free stations because they operated without licenses, but because the free stations represented competition"(Soley, 133, 1999). LPFM stations acting as *free stations* exhibiting competition towards commercial broadcasters is significant as the interference claim seemed to unravel.

The dubious claim was further investigated in an independent engineering study commissioned to determine if third adjacent frequency requirements were necessary. The study was completed by the MITRE Corporation. MITRE concluded, "MITRE does not feel that there is enough perceptible interference from LPFM stations operating on third-

adjacent channels to warrant the expense of a Phase II economic analysis"(The MITRE Corporation, 2003).

Microbroadcasters and sources other than the MITRE study continued to point towards the term *interference* as more generally referring to *unwanted competition*. One of these other sources wrote that "Many LPFM advocates still believe fear of competition was the true impetus behind NPR's and NAB's positions"(Kim, 22, 2003). NPR was trying to sort out their position. For example, Jim du Bois of the Minnesota Broadcasters Association sent a memo to other stations stating, "You should avoid arguments suggesting that the proposed new service would create more competition; rather, you should emphasize the interference and regulatory problems microbroadcasting would certainly generate"(Walker, 2001, 254).

Instead of speaking to competition as a motivation the NAB attacked the MITRE Report. In comments released on October 14, 2003, the NAB wrote, "the Report is fraught with major technical flaws, including site selection, frequency selection, receiver selection, receiver characterization and testing methodology, so that the resultant test data could in no way support any recommendation regarding the feasibility of relaxing third adjacent channel spacing requirements for LPFM stations"(NAB, 2003).

The interference versus competition claims circulated for several years before they began to surface in regulation. Senator John McCain put forward a bill: the Local Community Radio Act of 2005:

> [The bill] would increase the number of LPFM station
>
> licenses by removing the restrictions on minimum channel
>
> separations between broadcasters. When McCain's bill was

introduced in February, dozens of LPFM practitioners and advocates packed a forum at the FCC and conducted the biggest lobbying day in the history of community radio on Capitol Hill. And this time, McCain is determined to make sure that industry lies will not define the debate. [McCain said] it is time for broadcasters to stop hiding behind false claims of interference when they are really afraid of the competition from truly local broadcasters (McChesney, 2005, 33).

As of November, 2006, third adjacent frequency requirements remain in place. This restriction limits the number of LPFM stations that can broadcast.

Competition deals with audience share, ratings and hence, advertising or underwriting dollars. Sue Carpenter reported in her book, *40 Watts from Nowhere,* that a microbroadcaster:

[M]ay have been busted because he was taunting the FCC, though other pirates claim that WHTP, The Point—a commercial alternative rock station—turned him in. The Point's general manager had complained [that the station] on 102.1 was causing interference with his station on 102.5. But micro radio operators have another theory: [the] station was showing up in the local Arbitron ratings"(Carpenter, 2004, 163).

As a contradictory point, competition might not be more specifically defined as competition for advertising dollars. LPFM stations are non-commercial (FCC, 2000). At KJRZ, a LPFM station in Libby, Montana, the station managers said that, "For now, there's no advertising and no revenue coming in. We're losing money"(Kadel, 2005). Freedom of speech could be found in an investigation of competition considered as ideological competition. This pursuit is left for future researchers.

Modification Two of Two

The second modification to the report restricted previous unlicensed operators from obtaining a LPFM license. One response to this restriction stated that "The FCC have argued that such people [former illegal broadcasters], by virtue of their disobedience, establish that they will be "unreliable" license holders"(Ruggiero, 1999, 35). This second modification also helped split the microbroadcasting movement. Additionally, it was a Catch 22 situation for the movement, that is, how can someone be fined for illegal microbroadcasting when legal microbroadcasting did not exist? It blames people for being unreliable when there was no reliable option. In 1998, Federal Judge Claudia Wilken responded to microbroadcaster Stephen Dunifer of Free Radio Berkley stating, "Mr. Dunifer does not have [legal] standing… because he has never applied for a license"(Ruggiero, 1999, 26). Attorney Luke Hiken said that "This is a case that could drag on for fifty years"(Soley, 1999,130). Fifty years is a long time for policy to form and to sustain a movement. As mentioned before, the microbroadcasting movement clustered into two groups, one desired legal broadcasting and the others that would carry on illegally. The group desiring legal broadcasting was further divided because those with

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experience through previous illegal microbroadcasting were excluded from the new

LPFM service. This fragmentation weakened the movement.

Despite fragmentation and regulatory disputes, LPFM broadcasting has persisted.

As an example, respondents in this study show stations beginning broadcast peaked in

2004 and then began to decline. As of November, 2006, seven hundred sixty nine (769)

LPFM stations are on the air (http://www.fcc.gov/mb/audio/fmq.html).

Methodology

In April 2006 the primary researcher, Philip Goetz, developed a questionnaire to gather data related to the LPFM broadcasting field. Using single, multiple and open-ended response questions the questionnaire gathered data related to the following variables: station history; staff and volunteers; stations' roles; DJ aims; programming; listener feedback and local roots. The questionnaire was field tested that same month with college radio DJs and two college broadcast advisors. Based on these results, the questionnaire was revised to make sure responses were mutually exclusive and not misleading.

Responses were solicited from an FCC database of all licensed stations; http://www.fcc.gov/mb/audio/fmq.html. The database revealed seven hundred twenty nine (729) entries on April 5, 2006. Between May and August of 2006 an invitation to complete a questionnaire was sent to all LPFM radio stations. Twelve (12) were unable to be reached via email, phone or direct mail. One hundred thirty three (133) stations, representing an 18.5% response rate, completed the questionnaire which provides an overview of LPFM programming and practices. The larger organizations that the stations are attached to, such as churches, schools or non-profits combined with their missions, locally directed action and integration of listener feedback offer glimpses into the direction of and strengths in this emerging field.

The Internet survey design tool *Survey Monkey* (www.surveymonkey.com) allows researchers to format a questionnaire on a webpage accessible from a custom URL. An email announcement was sent to all LPFM stations for which an email address could be located. For every station, the FCC database contains a mailing address and the

organization the station is licensed to. Most entries contain a phone number. No entries

contain an email address. Contact email addresses were located in different ways.

Initially, the call letters were typed into Internet search engines. A second source used the

Internet to find the organization to which the station is licensed. A third source was a

database maintained by an engineering law firm (www.fccinfo.com). This database

contains LPFM station information and includes some email addresses. If searching the

Internet revealed no contact email addresses, a phone call went to the number listed on

the FCC website. If no one answered, a message was left. Stations without a phone

number received a hard copy of the questionnaire along with a self addressed stamped

envelope. Three conditions signified a sufficient effort in contacting stations; first, if an

emailed announcement was sent, second, if a telephone message was left, and third, if a

hard copy of the questionnaire was mailed. In the event that multiple responses came

from one station only the first completed response was scored. The first response was

completed 5/1/2006 and the final response was completed 8/29/2006.

Results as Tables

Table 1: Individuals contacted

	Sent (n)	Failed	Delivered	Success
Email	1036	256	780	75.3%
Telephone	206	86	120	58.3%
Mail	94	12	82	87.2%
Total	**1336**	**354**	**982**	**73.5%**

Table 1 shows the difficulty in contacting LPFM stations. No database exists with up-to-date contact information. The FCC database functions as an initial representation of the station but by no means as a comprehensive resource. A more useful resource would be updated regularly. Forty two percent (42%) of radio station telephone numbers in the FCC database are incorrect.

Table 2: Valid responses

		Frequency
No call letters listed	19	10%
Multiple responses from one station	14	8%
Did not want to participate	7	4%
No LPFM license	4	2%
Call letters not on LPFM list	3	2%
Did not complete questionnaire but submitted a comment	3	2%
Total valid responses	**133**	**73%**
n=183		

Table 2 removes incomplete and multiple responses. A total of one hundred eighty three (183) responses were received of which seventy three percent (73%) or one hundred thirty three (133) were counted. Respondents with "no call letters listed" and

with no LPFM license were interested enough to click on the questionnaire and begin but will not be included in analysis because the level of measurement is at the station level. Only three responses came from stations that are not in the FCC database as a LPFM station which demonstrates a precise distribution of the questionnaire to the desired population.

Table 3: Response rate

Total contacted	717
Total responded	133
Response rate	**18.5%**
n=717	

Table 3 shows questionnaire completion as the result of emailing, calling and mailing hard copies to LPFM stations and the organizations in which they operate. Five hundred eighty four (584) people received the email, phone message or direct mailing and were not a part of this study.

Table 4: Role at station

		Frequency
Management	97	73%
DJ	60	45%
Volunteer	47	35%
Teacher / Instructor / Advisor	50	38%
Employee	18	14%
Percentages do not total 100 due to multiple responses; n=133.		

Table 4 shows how the respondents characterize their role at the station. Fifty nine percent (59%) of respondents chose more than one role. This shows a lack of specialization and the multiple hats LPFM practitioners wear. Engineers, directors, board members and owners each represent less than ten percent (10%) of the reported roles.

Table 5: Main career is working for the radio station

		Frequency
Yes	20	15%
No	113	85%
n=133		

Table 5 shows that not only do respondents have multiple roles at the station, but that station work is usually not their sole occupation. Respondents listed sixty two (62) different fields as their sole occupation. Some of these were occupations from which the respondent had retired. One respondent wrote, "we all have full-time jobs plus responsibilities at the local church, so time is limited." Other station characteristics included ninety-seven percent (97%) of respondents who believed they have a say in station decisions and eighty-seven percent (87%) who live within broadcast range of the station.

Table 6: Station began broadcasting

Year	Responses	Frequency
Prior to 1999	1	1%
2000	1	1%
2001	3	2%
2002	12	9%
2003	22	17%
2004	52	40%
2005	34	25%
2006	7	4%
Don't know	1	1%
n=132		

Table 6 qualifies respondents. Only one respondent believed that their station began broadcasting LPFM before the actual licensing period began, in 2000. Responses show new LPFM stations taking to the air less frequently. One effect of third adjacent

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frequency requirements is less open frequencies. If there are none available there will be

no licenses granted.

Table 7: Organizations where stations are based

		Frequency
Non-profit	83	63%
Religious organization	49	37%
School (part of k-12 system)	15	11%
College or university	15	11%
A small business	14	11%
A corporation	11	8%
Traffic or weather safety / emergency response	6	5%
Other	7	5%
Percentages do not total 100 due to multiple responses; n=131		

Table 7 shows the larger entity in which the station resides. These responses are

important when comparing other characteristics. The answer to the question *"Who is*

doing what?" depends on where the station is located and what the larger mission of that

organization may be. Sixty-three percent (63%) of responses came from non-profits.

Table 8: Number of people paid for their role at the station

		Frequency
0	85	64%
1	31	23%
2	11	8%
3	5	4%
4	0	0%
5+	1	1%
n=133		

Table 8 shows the structure of the station. Pay for work typically requires

formalisms such as job descriptions and budgets. Sixty-four percent (64%) of stations

have no jobs attached to pay. At eighty percent (80%) of stations, tasks are shared

between professionals and non-professionals. Fifty-two percent (52%) of stations have

DJs who have worked at radio stations in the past.

Table 9: Number of station volunteers

		Frequency
0	10	8%
1-2	25	19%
2-4	26	20%
5-8	32	24%
9-12	7	5%
13-20	11	9%
21+	20	15%
n=133		

Table 9 shows that eighty-two percent (82%) of stations are on the air due to the

efforts of more than one person. Of the twenty (20) stations with more than twenty one

(21) volunteers, thirteen (13) are non-profit, five (5) are college or universities and one

(1) is at a religious organization.

Table 10: Stations with websites

		Frequency
Yes	82	62%
No	51	38%
n=133		

Table 10 shows that sixty-two percent (62%) of respondent stations have an

online presence. Websites are an outreach to listeners and volunteers.

Table 11: Stations that stream

		Frequency
Yes	39	30%
No	83	62%
Other	11	8%
Percentages do not total 100 due to multiple responses; n=133		

Table 11 shows stations that have achieved a continuation of the technical sophistication shown in table 10. Online audiences introduce a branch of community media research interested in the connection between the area in which a broadcaster is located and the location of the audience to which it broadcasts. This investigation is left for future researchers and could include a content analysis of current broadcasts along with geographic origination of audience feedback. Of the thirty nine (39) stations that stream, twenty one (21) are based at non-profits, nine (9) at religious organizations and five (5) at colleges or universities. The most common response for *other* is "we will soon".

Table 12: Stations tracking audiences

		Frequency
Informal conversations	66	63%
We do not collect information about our audience	63	47%
Volunteer / informational sessions or classes	17	13%
Open meetings	16	12%
Mailing questionnaires to listeners	13	10%
Questionnaires on website	13	10%
Arbitron or a different ratings service	11	8%
Focus groups	6	5%
Other	24	18%
Percentages do not total 100 due to multiple responses; n=104		

Table 12 seeks respondent's use of audience feedback. Sixty-three percent (63%) of respondents chose "informal conversations" as a technique for tracking audiences. Almost half, forty-seven percent (47%), of respondents do not have any ways of tracking

audiences. Most common responses for *other* include "telephone," "word of mouth" and "through donations or fundraisers".

Table 13: Station viability

		Frequency
Financially sound	40	31%
Doing okay	65	49%
Struggling to stay on the air	25	19%
Don't know	2	1%
n=131		

Table 13 shows that sixty-nine percent (69%) of responding stations are not financially sound, though forty nine percent (49%) of respondents said that they were, "optimistic about the direction of our station." Within one percentage point, stations that are "doing okay" match the number of stations where "funding" is the biggest barrier to producing station programming. They are getting by but with little money. Other problems facing stations came through answers to the question, "What is the biggest barrier to producing station shows?" Fifty percent (50%) said "funding", seventeen percent (17%) said "research time", and common responses for "other" included "training", "man power" and "time".

Table 14: Local characteristics

	Yes		No		Don't know	
Local newspapers have written about our station in the last year n=129	89	(69%)	34	(26%)	6	(5%)
We get locally based business underwriting or local sponsors n=131	85	(65%)	46	(35%)	0	(0%)
The station pulls together diverse interests in this city n=130	83	(64%)	24	(18%)	23	(18%)
Local leaders have commended our station n=130	71	(55%)	34	(26%)	25	(19%)
The station encourages community participation n=129	110	(85%)	12	(9%)	7	(6%)
The chamber of commerce has commended our station n=129	35	(27%)	59	(46%)	35	(27%)
Our DJs play music from locally based musicians n=132	93	(70%)	25	(19%)	14	(11%)

Table 14 shows several different measures of how stations fit into their local communities. Local newspapers have written about sixty-nine (69%) of respondents' stations in the last year.

Table 15: Types of radio shows produced

		Frequency
Music	83	65%
Religious	52	41%
Current events	36	28%
Talk	35	27%
None	23	18%
Hobby / special interest	15	12%
News	15	12%
Sports	15	12%
Other	14	11%
Politics	12	9%
Percentages do not total 100 due to multiple responses; n=128		

Table 15 reveals programs created by the respondents. Of the twenty three (23) respondents who produce no shows, only two (2) were DJs. Of these two respondents, one listed their role as the "executive director" and the other as "secretary". No additional information was gathered for respondents who chose "other".

Table 16: Influences on station programming

		Frequency
Station management	93	71%
Community need	77	59%
Listeners	77	59%
Community events	66	50%
Computer play lists	47	36%
We air syndicated radio shows	41	31%
None apply	1	1%
Other	19	15%
Percentages do not total 100 due to multiple responses; n=131		

Table 16 shows community involvement at more than half the stations. Stations' levels of feedback are high as listeners influence programming at fifty-nine percent (59%) of stations. Common responses for "other" include "station mission" and "DJ preferences". "Promoting values" is important to eighty-three percent (83%) of the respondents.

Table 17: Ways station shows are alternative to mainstream media

		Frequency
Music	98	75%
A diverse range of content	72	55%
We reach underserved audiences	65	50%
Cultural views	50	38%
Political views	28	21%
We are mainstream media	5	4%
Other	43	33%
Percentages do not total 100 due to multiple responses; n=131		

Table 17 shows the results of a question using a word well established in community media research, "alternative". Only four percent (4%) of stations believed that they were not an alternative. Twenty one (21) responses for "other" mentioned religious programming and five (5) mentioned local programming. Fifty percent (50%) of respondents believe that their audience is underserved by commercial radio.

Table 18: Callers fit into radio shows in various ways

		Frequency
Callers request songs	63	50%
Callers express opinions	53	42%
Callers are not involved in shows	46	36%
Our DJs put callers on the air	37	29%
Listeners contact our DJs via the Internet during shows	26	20%
Other	14	11%
Percentages do not total 100 due to multiple responses; n=127		

Table 18 shows that there are many ways for the audience to communicate with some stations. Forty-five percent (45%) of respondents do not know when the largest audience tunes in. Callers are one way of tracking audiences and a knowledge of when the most people tune in is another. Seventeen percent (17%) believe that time is "7am – 9am" and eleven percent (11%) believe it is "1pm – 5pm". This data is useful for future researchers in possibly completing a content analysis of streaming stations programming because it is useful to examine the most popular programming.

Table 19: DJ characteristics

Questions	Yes		No		Don't know	
Our DJs educate the audience n=131	106	(81%)	8	(6%)	17	(13%)
Our DJs decide the content for their shows n=132	94	(71%)	25	(19%)	13	(10%)
Out DJs entertain the audience n=130	93	(72%)	20	(15%)	17	(13%)
On the air, our DJs succeed at changing public opinion n=131	37	(28%)	26	(20%)	68	(52%)

Table 19 shows respondents think their DJs educate the audience more than they entertain the audience, eighty-one percent (81%) to seventy-two percent (72%) respectively. Twenty-eight percent of respondents (28%) claim strong audience impact among DJs, "on the air, our DJs succeed at changing public opinion."

Feedback and Localism Indices

Feedback and localism are two indices built from selecting positive responses to select questions. Questions measuring these attributes were scattered throughout the questionnaire presented to the respondents. The range of the feedback index is 0 to12. A score of "0" meant that the station did not answer any questions positively that asked about feedback. Questions scored appear in Appendix A. The range of the localism index is 0 to 10. Questions scored appear in Appendix B.

Table 20: Feedback and localism

	Feedback Means	Localism Means
Overall n=133	3.2	6.18
Religious stations n=49	2.45	5.24
Non-profits but not religious nor school-based n=54	4	7.3
Respondents who are DJs n=60	3.58	6.83
Air syndicated programming n=41	3.8	6.78
Use computer playlists n= 47	3.79	6.7
Does not know when largest audience tunes in n= 59	2.85	5.92

Religious stations are below the overall mean on feedback and localism. Non-profits scored higher than the mean on both. DJs report higher levels of feedback (3.58) and localism (6.83) than the overall means. Stations that air syndicated programming are not less open to feedback nor are they less local. Similarly, stations that use computer playlists are not less open to feedback nor are they less local. Stations that do not know when the largest audience tunes in are below the mean in both levels of feedback and levels of localism.

Discussion

This study did not focus solely on feedback and localism because there are other characteristics to describe LPFM broadcasters. Likewise this study did not focus on non-profits or on school based stations because an important aspect of, what I am calling, a survey snapshot, is an equal investigation into all participants in a field.

This document will be circulated back into the population studied so that all may benefit. Most respondents indicated an interest in the results of this study. The questionnaire ended with a space for any additional comments. These qualitative results are illuminating:

> Best of luck with your study! Please alert your participants when the results of the survey, or your completed paper, are available. Low power radio does not seem to have caught on as it should have, and anything we can do to promote it will be valuable. Commercial radio ill serves the public, and any more responsible uses of the radio airwaves should be encouraged and supported enthusiastically. Thanks for asking for my participation.
>
> - *Community station on the East Coast.*

> Wish I could learn about your findings. I wish I could learn about how to contact other Presbyterian churches operating LP stations.
>
> - *Religious station in the Midwest*

> Thank you for your interest in LP-FM. LP-fm allows diversity in programming that the corporate broadcasters don't allow. I have never been involved in broadcasting until this opportunity was afforded me. I truly see it making in roads into the community.
>
> -*Religious station in Appalachia*

Recommendations for Future Research

Audio streaming over the Internet allows researchers to listen to LPFM stations all over the country. It used to be that one would have to physically travel within broadcast range of the station to make a recording of a broadcast. Another out dated method could collect tapes from stations. This process is costly, respectively, because travel is expensive and programming provided by stations would be self-selected and possibly have content that did not air. These methodological problems point to the ease of listening at set times online and completing a content analysis of programming. This would provide an interesting component to this study because it would provide actual broadcast content as opposed to self-reported content.

Appendix A

Appendix A: Feedback

The feedback index is scored from the following answers:

Our station tracks audiences through mailing questionnaires to listeners.

Our station tracks audiences through questionnaires on website.

Our station tracks audiences through open meetings.

Our station tracks audiences through focus groups.

Our station tracks audiences through informal conversations.

Our station tracks audiences through volunteer / informational sessions or classes.

The content of station programming is influenced by listeners.

Callers fit into radio shows by requesting songs.

Callers fit into radio shows by expressing opinions.

Callers fit into radio shows by DJs putting them on the air.

Listeners contact DJs via the Internet during shows.

On the air our DJs succeed at changing public opinion.

Appendix B

Appendix B: Localism

The localism index is scored from the following answers:

My place of residence is within broadcast range of the station.

We get locally based business underwriting or local sponsors.

The station encourages community participation.

Local newspapers have written about our station in the past year.

The station pulls together diverse interests in this city.

The chamber of commerce has commended our station.

Local leaders have commended our station.

The content of station programming is influenced by community need.

The content of station programming is influenced by community events.

Our DJs play music from locally based bands.

Appendix C

Appendix C: The solicitation letter (sent via email and modified for direct mail)

RE: Nationwide survey on Low Power FM radio

You are being asked to participate in a research study by a student in the department of Radio-Television-Film at the University of Texas at Austin. I obtained your contact info primarily through the FCC website. To encourage completion of the survey two respondents will be chosen at random to receive a fifty dollar gift certificate redeemable at www.amazon.com. The survey is intended to gather information about your knowledge of low power radio and can be accessed here:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=317042068224

Your answers contribute to information that strengthens low power radio in the U.S. If you know another person who would complete the survey, please refer them by replying and listing their contact information below:

Name:
Affiliation:
Email Address:

Philip Goetz
Graduate Researcher
Department of Radio-TV-Film
The University of Texas at Austin
philip_goetz@mail.utexas.edu

Appendix D

Appendix D: The questionnaire

Nationwide Survey on Low Power Radio

Welcome to the survey!

The purpose of this study is to analyze and compare:
- the rationale for the start of LPFM licensing in 2000
- the self-reported aims of decision makers at LPFM stations
- current LPFM broadcast content

If you agree to be in this study, you are asked to fill out the short survey accessible at the bottom of this page. Total estimated time to finish is 10 minutes.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections: Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop your participation at any time. To do so simply tell the researcher. You can xerox a copy of this consent form for your records.

The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.

The risks associated with this study are no greater than everyday life. There are no benefits for participation in this study. The records of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin and members of the Institutional Review Board have the legal right to review research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. Throughout the study, the researcher will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

Contacts and Questions: If you have any questions or want additional information, contact Philip Goetz, (philip_goetz@mail.utexas.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, complaints, concerns, or questions about this research please contact Lisa Leiden, Ph.D., Chair of The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (512) 471-8871 or email: orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Philip Goetz | The University of Texas at Austin | Telephone: 512.658.0525

1. Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study.

⚪ I would like to participate!

⚪ I do not wish to participate.

2. ESTIMATE the number of LPFM licenses your organization holds.

None	1	2-5	6-10	11-20	21+
⚪	⚪	⚪	⚪	⚪	⚪

Introductory information

3. What are the call letters of your radio station?
(If you work with more than one station this survey refers to the low power FM station that you spend the most time working with.)

[ ]

4. When did the station begin broadcasting?

prior to 1999	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	don't know
⚪	⚪	⚪	⚪	⚪	⚪	⚪	⚪	⚪	⚪

5. Does your station have a website? If so, enter it in the space below. If not, leave this item blank.

[ ]

6. Does your station stream audio live over the internet?

◯ Yes, at the website listed above.

◯ No.

◯ Other (please specify)

[   ]

7. How many full or part-time people are paid for their role at the station?

0	1	2	3	4	5 or more
◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

8. How many volunteers does the station have?

0	1-2	2-4	5-8	9-12	13-20	21+
◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

9. What is your role at the radio station? (Check all that apply)

☐ DJ

☐ Volunteer

☐ Management

☐ Employee

☐ Teacher / Instructor / Advisor

☐ Other (please specify)

[   ]

10. Do you have a job title at the radio station? (If so, enter in the space below)

[   ]

11. Is working for the radio station your main career?

○ Yes

○ No, my main career is: (Enter below)

[   ]

12. May I contact you with additional questions? If so, provide your email address, if not, leave this item blank.

[   ]

13. Show(s)

	Yes	No	Don't know / Not Applicable
On the air, our DJs succeed at changing public opinion.	○	○	○
Our DJs have worked at a radio station(s) in the past.	○	○	○
Our DJs educate the audience.	○	○	○
Promoting values is important for our station.	○	○	○
Our DJs entertain the audience.	○	○	○
Our DJs play music from locally based musicians.	○	○	○
Our DJs decide the content for their show(s).	○	○	○

14. In what respect(s) are your station's radio shows alternative to mainstream media? (check all that apply)

☐ We are mainstream media

☐ Music

☐ Political views

☐ We reach underserved audiences

☐ Cultural views

☐ A diverse range of content

☐ Other (please specify)

---

15. What is the biggest barrier to producing station shows? (check one)

○ Copyright

○ Research time

○ Conflict with station staff

○ Finding music

○ Funding

○ Keeping up with current events

○ Other (please specify)

You are more than half way done! Don't forget to enter the drawing for a gift certificate at the end.

16. What type of radio show(s) do YOU produce? (check all that apply)

none	music	talk	sports	news	politics	current events	hobby / special interest	religious	other
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

17. What type of radio show(s) does YOUR STATION produce? (check all that apply)

our station does not have shows	music	talk	sports	news	politics	current events	hobby / special interest	religious	other
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Station Operations

18. Our station is based at an organization most resembling (check all that apply):

☐ School (part of k-12 system)

☐ College or University

☐ Religious organization

☐ A small business

☐ A corporation

☐ Non-profit

☐ Traffic or weather safety / emergency response

☐ Other (please specify)

[_____]

19. In general our station is

◗ financially sound.

◗ doing okay.

◗ struggling to stay on the air.

◗ don't know

Station Operations

20. Our station tracks audiences through (check all that apply):

☐ We do not collect information about our audience(s)

☐ Arbitron or a different ratings service

☐ Mailing questionnaires to listeners

☐ Questionnaire on website

☐ Open meetings

☐ Focus groups

☐ Informal conversations

☐ Volunteer / informational sessions or classes

☐ Other (please specify)

21. The content of station programming is influenced by (check all that apply):

☐ Listeners

☐ Community need

☐ Community events

☐ Station management

☐ Computer play lists

☐ We air syndicated radio shows

☐ None apply

☐ Other (please specify)

22. Station Operations

	Yes	No	Don't know
I have a say in station decisions.	○	○	○
Professionals and non-professionals share tasks at the station.	○	○	○
I am optimistic about the direction of our station.	○	○	○
We get locally based business underwriting or local sponsors.	○	○	○

Our Audience

23. Our audience(s) is underserved by commercial radio.

○ No

○ Yes

○ Don't know

24. When does the largest audience tune in?

Don't know	7am-9am	9am-1pm	1pm-5pm	5pm-7pm	7pm-11pm	11pm-1am	after 1am
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

25. When does the second largest audience tune in?

Don't know	7am-9am	9am-1pm	1pm-5pm	5pm-7pm	7pm-11pm	11pm-1am	after 1am
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

26. Callers fit into radio shows in various ways. (Check all that apply)

☐ Callers are not involved in shows.

☐ Callers request songs.

☐ Callers express opinions.

☐ Our DJs put callers on the air.

☐ Listeners contact our DJs via the internet during shows

☐ Other (please specify)

27. Our Community

	Yes	No	Don't know / Not Applicable
The station encourages community participation.	○	○	○
Local newspapers have written about our station in the last year.	○	○	○
The station pulls together diverse interests in this city.	○	○	○
The chamber of commerce has commended our station.	○	○	○
Local leaders and politicians have commended our station.	○	○	○
My place of residence is within broadcast range of the station.	○	○	○

The last two questions!

28. How would you describe the mission of your radio station(s) or of your show(s)? (Attach an additional sheet of paper if necessary)

29. Do you have any additional comments for the researcher? (Attach an additional sheet of paper if necessary)

Win a prize!

30. Write in your email address if you would like to be included in a drawing for one of two fifty dollar gift certificates redeemable at www.amazon.com. To be included enter your email address below. If not, leave this final item blank!

You are done!!!

Thank you.

Philip Goetz

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Vita

Philip Daniel Goetz was born in Lima, Ohio on October 11, 1975. After completing his studies at Shawnee High School in 1994, he then attended Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana and graduated with a 3.0 GPA in 1999 with his B.A. in Communications. After graduation he accepted an assistant television producer position in Austin, Texas at Concordia University. Five years later, he resigned to pursue opportunities at The University of Texas at Austin. He's produced video in New Orleans, Orlando and Las Vegas, taught eight year olds how to shoot, develop and print 35mm film, and volunteered in all aspects of local amateur productions. In fact, he had the honor of running lights for several years at an annual live action Easter story. Though not a native Texan he was once given a coffee mug with the inscription *Honorary Texan*. He entered The University of Texas at Austin as a Masters student in August of 2003. As of November of 2006 he has no plans to pursue a Ph D.

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