



# Real College Radio: **KUOM** celebrates **100 YEARS** of putting the **R-A-D** in radio

**F**rom farm reports and football games broadcast in Morse code to education for homebound kids during the polio epidemic and from Garrison Keillor's radio roots to being one of the reasons *Rolling Stone* magazine thinks the U of M rocks...

Radio K (KUOM), the award-winning student-run radio station of the University of Minnesota, has covered a lot of ground in 100 years.

Radio broadcasting at the University began as an experiment in 1912. On January 13, 1922, the U received the first official radio broadcasting license issued for the state of Minnesota (AM 770, call sign WLB; changed to KUOM in 1945). Initially, programming featured agricultural and weather reports, along with lectures, concerts, and football games. In the 1930s, however, the station began adding distance education to its repertoire—including the historic "Minnesota School of the Air."

In 1948, a second station emerged on the University campus—this one an entirely student-volunteer-run organization,

WMMR AM 730. Programming included daily news and sport reports; campus event promotions; live play-by-play for basketball, football, and hockey; and live music broadcasts. It switched to a music format in the 1960s, while still broadcasting the news. Garrison Keillor, the well-known host of Minnesota Public Radio's "A Prairie Home Companion," began his radio career broadcasting classical music on WMMR as a student in the early 1960s.

In 1993 the two merged—the official birth of Radio K (KUOM AM 770). The "new" Radio K brought together a small, full-time staff working in conjunction with student employees who provided much of the on-air talent. Programming ran the gamut from ska, punk, funk, and indie rock, to news, current events, and sports coverage.

Today, the station continues its format of playing eclectic, independent music—both classic and new—and broadcasts on 100.7 and 1004.5 FM, 24/7 (and online around the world).

The technology has changed, and program content has varied, but throughout its history, Radio K has played a key role in the University community—and the outside community as a whole. "The world needs arts and cultural reporting, news reporting, curators of style (tastemakers), and portals to access this information to educate and inspire," says Sara Miller, station manager at Radio K. "College radio—Radio K—is in a unique position to be at the forefront of the changing media landscape."

## Timeline ☆ 1910s

Radio transmissions at the University date to 1912, when a professor named F.W. Springer began experimenting with broadcasts, though he probably just used a spark gap transmitter. Activities were suspended by World War I, though the first U of M football games are broadcast in Morse code. By 1920, electrical engineering professor C.M. Jansky, Jr. was doing broadcasting again.

## ★ 1920s

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



1930s

The station begins to broadcast a considerable amount of educational material and was used for distance learning — a practice that continued into the 1990s.



1940s

The station call letters are changed from WLB to KUOM. A polio epidemic in 1946 that resulted in temporary school closings led the station to create award-winning programming for children who were homebound. "Minnesota School of the Air," as it was called, designed with the aid of teachers, substituted for the closed schools.



1960s

In 1968, campus "sister station" WMMR covers presidential elections as part of an eight-station organization, which included live coverage of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. In 1969, KUOM introduces a whole series of



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



WMMR becomes an important national news source on campus strikes and protests during the Vietnam War. KUOM begins "Scope," the first hour-long noncommercial news program on Twin Cities radio. "Scope" continues until 1985 when the format changes.



1970s



1980s

In 1981, WMMR is programmed as a Top 40 station. Listenership is on the rise. The students in charge go on to run commercial Top 40 station WLOL. Three years later, WMMR format is changed to College/Alternative. Listenership plummets. In 1988, technical problems, including the main audio board catching fire, knock WMMR temporarily off the air. KUOM adopts call-in format (shown) to make use of the expertise of University faculty. This style of program continues until 1993.

KUOM. A small full-time staff oversees operations and provides a certain level of continuity, while students would provide much of the on-air talent while going through their radio studies.

One of the veterans of that launch period, MPR News director Steve Nelson, remembers: "The day Radio K launched... I was on my bike, racing across the Washington Avenue bridge when the station signed on the air for the very first time. Jim Musil cracked the mike, said, 'The oldest station in the state, is now the newest, and launched into The Ramones 'Do You Remember Rock N Roll Radio.' It was a new day for college radio and Minnesota music, and I couldn't be prouder to have been a part of it."

Mark Wheat (now of The Current fame) joins the station as the program coach later in the decade. "After I joined," he says, "when people asked me what I did I said I had the dream job! When I left the K in 2005 to help start MPR's new project (The Current), I told the students that what we were contemplating doing there was only possible because of the success of Radio K. I am hugely proud to be a part of Radio K's illustrious history, carrying on the great tradition of Minnesota radio...[It's] the best state to be in for radio fans!"

## ★ 2000s

In 2005, *Rolling Stone's* "Schools that Rock" article naming Radio K the reason that the University of Minnesota rocks (one of many accolades the station would receive). The station adopts a new slogan: "Where Music Matters Most." In 2009, Radio K goes on FM 24 hours per day at 104.5 FM and 100.7 FM

## ★ 2010s

New U of M President Eric Kaler appears on Radio K's "Rock 'n Roll Over" to celebrate back to school and his 2011 inauguration week. In honor of "100 years of cool," Mayor R.T. Rybak declares September 21, 2012, as "Radio K Day" in Minneapolis.



1990s

U arranges exclusive rights to 770kHz (previously shared with St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn.) and Radio K is born in 1993 with the merging of WMMR and

