INTERCOLLEGIATE FOOTBALL AND EDUCATIONAL RADIO: THREE CASE STUDIES OF THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF SPORTS BROADCASTING IN THE 1920S AND 1930S

A Dissertation in
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by
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ABSTRACT

From the late 1920s to the mid-1930s, broadcasting of intercollegiate sports at many state institutions migrated from educational radio stations to commercial networks. Amid the economic pressures of the Great Depression, the sale of sports broadcasting rights provided universities with a steady revenue stream, while the publicity from the broadcasts raised their profile among citizens and legislators whose support was crucial to state institutions. Yet, commercialization bolstered critics’ claims that intercollegiate athletics had become a business rather than an extracurricular activity. Drawing upon the scholarship of critical political economy, this dissertation examined the process by which commercial radio became the venue for big-time intercollegiate athletics—even at institutions that had their own radio stations—at a time when reformers insisted that only an amateur status and educational purpose for sports could justify the presence of big-time athletics on campus. In case studies of three land-grant institutions—Penn State, Ohio State, and the University of Wisconsin—this dissertation found that the decision to sell broadcast privileges was resisted by directors of educational radio stations on campus, supported by athletic and conference directors, and largely ignored by administrative pragmatists who were distracted by the daunting task of keeping their institutions solvent throughout the Depression. This study concluded that the decline of educational radio as a purveyor of college sports mirrored the overall decline of non-commercial broadcasting in the 1930s. It also reflected the wider debate on the role of the state as the representative of the collective interest in a free enterprise system. The partnership between big-time football schools and commercial broadcasters, forged in the Depression Era, created the climate of collaboration in which television broadcasting of intercollegiate athletics would flourish in subsequent decades. Ohio State and Wisconsin were exceptions in that they continued to carry intercollegiate sports on their own university stations. In doing so, each demonstrated the feasibility of an economic model for
sports broadcasting that was grounded in the public service outreach and extension missions of the land-grant institution rather than the competitive, profit-seeking model of commercial radio.
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“The appeal to historical fact or opinion, whether recorded in the past in question or by some later historian, always makes me uneasy. It is, of necessity, one man’s view or one party’s view which, in either case, is not accepted by other men or other parties. So the historical narrative can never be authoritative for us, nor free us from the necessity of making up our own minds.”

– Alexander Meiklejohn, 1961
Chapter 1

Introduction

The walls of the corridor that encircles the main gymnasium of Penn State’s Recreation Hall display a visual chronicle of interscholastic athletics at the university. Representing the modest start of Penn State football is a sepia-tone photograph of the 1887 squad. Eleven men in white front-laced jerseys gaze solemnly into the camera. They are flanked by a student manager and a coach, each wearing a black suit and top hat. The picture is the centerpiece of a collage of sports teams from 1887, indicative of the central role football quickly assumed in Penn State athletics. To walk the full distance of the corridor is to take a chronological tour through more than a century of Penn State sports. The size of the football squad increases tenfold, and the variety of sports expands to at least 27 men’s and women’s intercollegiate teams. Beginning in 2003, however, football is no longer represented alongside the team photograph of gymnasts, wrestlers, fencers, and swimmers. In both size and stature, football has outgrown the walls of Recreation Hall—its annual photograph now exhibited in its own building on the other side of campus.

The Louis and Mildred Lasch Football Building symbolizes the status of big-time intercollegiate football in the 21st century. The sprawling complex, named for its wealthy benefactors, houses the offices of the football coaches and staff. It also features a 13,000-square foot weight room, whirlpool therapy, players’ lounge, video production facility, 180-seat auditorium for watching game tapes, and an academic support center and computer room. An enormous wood-paneled locker room accommodates the 100-plus rostered players who can shower in stalls decorated with customized Nittany Lion tiles. In addition to the substantial team meeting room there are individual rooms for various positions on the football team. A full-sized
practice field adjoins the building. It is a facility befitting the multi-million dollar enterprise that big-time college football has become.¹

The transformation of intercollegiate athletics from a student pastime to big business played out on college campuses throughout the United States in the 20th century. At nearly every big-time football school, what was once a student-initiated extracurricular activity is now an auxiliary division of the university with its own budget, personnel, boosters, scholarships, and corporate sponsors. In fact, intercollegiate athletics have become precisely what early 20th century reformers had sought to avoid—a commercial spectacle that serves the physical education needs of relatively few students and the scholastic needs of even fewer.² Furthermore, intercollegiate athletics are a financial drain on most institutions, losing millions of dollars a year in some cases.³ An analysis by USA Today in 2010 found that some of the richest athletic conferences, widely perceived to be self-supporting, are sustained by hundreds of millions of dollars in student fees and university subsidies despite an ongoing financial crisis in higher education.⁴ Although many university administrators concede that athletics have spun out of control, they are not able to reel them in. Like the banking industry in the first decade of the 21st century, college sports have become too big to fail.

While a variety of factors have contributed to the growth of modern intercollegiate athletics, this dissertation focuses on one narrow aspect—the origin of policies that led to the commercialization of college football broadcasts. The phenomenal growth of intercollegiate football would not have occurred without the media—first print, but ultimately and spectacularly,

² A report prepared by the Congressional Budget Office in 2009 suggested that NCAA Division IA sports programs may have “crossed the line from educational to commercial endeavors.” See: Congressional Budget Office, “Tax Preferences for Collegiate Sports” (Washington, DC: GPO, May 2009), p.9.
the electronic media. Propelled by the exigencies of commercial broadcasting, big-time college
football followed an upwardly spiraling path of expansion and expenditure as universities strove
to produce winning teams with media appeal.

This study is concerned particularly with land-grant colleges and universities that once
carried intercollegiate games on their own licensed radio stations. As with other extension
projects, many land-grants institutions provided football coverage as part of their commitment to
share campus activities, events, research, and instruction with a wider audience. In the early
years of radio, college football aired on both commercial and non-profit radio. There was nothing
about commercial radio that made it inherently more suitable as a carrier of football. Rather, the
migration of college football to commercial radio was the product of decisions made by collegiate
administrators, radio industry leaders, and government officials operating within a political and
economic environment that supported outcomes consistent with corporate capitalism. The
collaboration was cemented in the 1930s, a decade comparable to the early 21st century in that
unprecedented prosperity was followed by economic collapse. The framework devised for
college football broadcasting, therefore, was made in the context of fiscal uncertainty, social
discontent, and an emerging critique of the established American political order. Voters who had
lost faith in a capitalistic system that had failed them rejected the corporate-oriented Herbert
Hoover in favor of a less-tested politician who promised to reform the way business was done in
America. Franklin Delano Roosevelt came into office with no detailed strategy, but he promised
bold and innovative change.

In 1932, radio had been a fixture in American homes for less than ten years. At the start
of the decade, ownership and regulatory issues were topics of heated debate in Congress as
industry and non-profit groups vied for access to limited frequencies, and radio critics denounced
the crass commercialism, monopolistic tendencies, and standardized programming of the
networks. Collegiate football was well-established and was generally the most popular sport on
campuses that fielded intercollegiate teams. However, a widely circulated Carnegie Foundation Report, published in 1929, leveled charges of corruption and commercialization against intercollegiate athletics that prompted cries for change. Some reformers believed that the hardships of the Depression would force higher education to throttle back on its sports programs. Amid the tumult of the 1930s, both radio and football might have taken divergent paths that would have addressed the clamor for reform. Instead, the status quo remained intact. What is more, both the radio industry and intercollegiate football became more fully commodified—that is, activities once produced by amateurs for their own enjoyment were professionalized, regulated, and packaged into discrete units measured by ratings, then sold back to the public as entertainment. Government and industry leaders were inclined to view the development of radio and football as products of a free market system that gave the public what it wanted. Limited regulation, perceived as necessary for the well-being of radio and football, was continually redefined as commercial potential expanded. Once the regulatory process in radio had eliminated most non-profit broadcasters, industry leaders hewed closely to a gospel of free markets and self-regulation that allowed them to interpret the public service provision of the law as they saw fit.

In the case of radio, a commercial system that left little room for non-profit broadcasters was established by the national radio conferences, the Radio Act of 1927, and the Federal Communications Act of 1934 which created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

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6 Cultural critic Pierre Bourdieu is closed associated with the study of the transformation of leisure activities into commodities. He argued that folk games produced by the people themselves were turned by industry into marketable entertainment then sold back to people as spectacle. See: Pierre Bourdieu, "Sport and Social Class," *Social Science Information* Vol. 17, No. 6 (1978), pp. 818-40. The phenomenon was poignantly described in 1936 by a former Wisconsin football player who had captained the Badgers in the 1890s. Contrasting the situation in his time from what it had become in the 1930s, he wrote, "the playing of games was a student activity. A happy condition of freedom in sport existed that has long since vanished….A football team with unnumbered players, with no radio announcer, no band and no regular cheer-leaders was just a team playing for its college….The change to the policy of preparing a limited group for a grand spectacle came quite rapidly in football." See: John R. Richards, "Football--a Game or a Business," *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, Vol. 38, No. 2, November, 1936, p.50.
McChesney, Godfried, Phipps, Craig, and Rinks are among the scholars who have documented the role of the broadcast industry in setting national standards that favored the networks (or “chains” as they were known in the 1920s and 1930s) and the effects of subsequent regulation on non-commercial broadcasters.7

Radio was one of the minor concerns for colleges and universities mired in the Depression. To some extent, intercollegiate sports were as well. One difference was that in the big-time athletic programs, football continued to make money, albeit with greatly reduced profit margins that meant overall belt-tightening and difficult decisions concerning the non-revenue generating sports programs. Some administrators viewed the Depression as a welcome opportunity to de-emphasize football.8 Others banned radio broadcasts of games because they blamed the play-by-play coverage for the declining attendance at stadiums. By the mid-1930s, however, many big-time football schools had come around to the view that the benefits of football broadcasts outweighed the drawbacks. They believed that media attention boosted attendance—the more widespread the coverage, the greater the boost. Radio broadcasts of football could keep state-supported schools in the public eye in a way that their research and academic achievements did not. Once the plum channel assignments were awarded to the large networks, commercial radio offered greater opportunities for publicity than educational radio stations. Among the earliest commercial sponsors in the Depression Era were oil companies that perceived a synergy between their industry and college football. The Saturday spectacle provided a destination for distant motorists. What had begun as mere game day coverage stretched into

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week-long pitches by radio sponsors who urged people with no connection to a particular school to join in the excitement at the stadium. In doing so, the groundwork was laid for more lucrative television contracts in the years ahead.

Yet, non-commercial radio was a viable alternative. On the campuses of land-grant universities, especially in the Midwest, radio had developed as a public service vehicle to spread education and information across the vast expanse of prairies and farmlands. Because the land-grant universities owed their very existence to the federal government and the taxpayers of the state, they believed they were duty-bound to share their research and resources with their fellow citizens. College football was one such resource. Although generally categorized as “entertainment” (if not “miscellaneous”), it was widely perceived as a means of easing the isolation of farmers and creating a sense of community that became increasingly important as the Depression wore on. Additionally, universities steadfastly maintained that intercollegiate sports had an educational purpose that justified their existence on college campuses. To counter the criticisms of the Carnegie Report, athletic directors touted the strength, courage, and leadership displayed by amateur players who sought no reward but the glory of their Alma Mater and the satisfaction of a job well done. Throughout the 1930s, officials such as Major John L. Griffith, the Commissioner of the Intercollegiate Conference or Big Ten (also known as the Western

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9 Harold Deal, "Sponsors Football Broadcasts Boost Game Attendance," *Broadcast Advertising*, Vol. 3, No. 10, November 15 1932, p 10. In addition, newspaper and magazine advertisements indicate the expansion of broadcasting beyond the game day broadcasts on commercial radio. In 1933, for example, *Broadcasting Magazine* carried an ad titled, “Touchdown for Wheaties,” which claimed that General Mills sales were up in Iowa thanks to the food company’s sponsorship of Big Ten football on a commercial station “plus six day a week broadcasting of ‘Jack Armstrong, All American Boy.’” See: "Advertisement," *Broadcasting*, Vol. 5, No. 12, December 15, 1933, p.4.

10 Tracy Ferris Tyler, "An Appraisal of Radio Broadcasting in the Land-Grant Colleges and Universities" (Columbia University, 1933). Tyler’s study for his doctoral dissertation was conducted under the auspices of the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, the Federal Office of Education, the United States Department of Agriculture, the National Advisory Council on Radio in Education (NACRE) and the National Committee on Education by Radio (NCER). In 1932, Tyler visited 71 land-grant institutions, conducting more than 600 in-depth interviews with administrators, faculty, and radio personnel. His study provides an important snapshot of the state of educational radio and the mindset of those in the Academy.
Conference), maintained that the gridiron was more effective than the classroom at instilling the perseverance, hard work, and loyalty needed by America’s future leaders. Amid the social tensions that came to the fore on campuses during the Depression—including protests over compulsory military training at each of the institutions examined in this study—football became part of the ideology of an essentially conservative “American way” of life that glorified and sought to preserve the status quo. Radio helped to disseminate that message.

In a study of intercollegiate athletics and media, sport historian Ronald A. Smith asked, “If, as athletic officials and university administrators often claimed, college athletics were an integral part of higher education, why didn’t universities continue to use their own radio stations to broadcast football games and gain control of the promotion and publicity coming from intercollegiate athletics?” This dissertation attempts to answer Smith’s question.

For decades, some universities did in fact carry athletic programming on their educational radio stations. It may be that they went largely unnoticed because there were so few of them. In addition, it is likely that their broadcasts—conducted with a minimum of fanfare—were overshadowed by commercial radio. Network stations not only covered the same events as the university broadcasters; they also publicized their coverage in newspapers and magazines and transformed their announcers into media celebrities. This study seeks to understand both the process by which college sports broadcasts became primarily the provenance of commercial entities and the circumstances under which a select few universities managed to continue athletic broadcasting well into the 1950s and 1960s. This examination of three “big-time” or revenue generating football schools found that the controversy over the commercialization of intercollegiate sports broadcasting played out as part of a wider, ideological debate on the role of

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government in protecting the social welfare and regulating social and economic systems. At Ohio State, in particular, tensions were evident among the various stakeholders: the radio directors who believed that football broadcasts were part of the public service mandate of the land-grant university; the president who believed that football could create communities of supporters beyond the university’s base of students and alumni; and the athletic department (and by extension, the Big Ten conference) which considered football as an ideological battleground where competition was reified as a bulwark against what was perceived as the creeping socialism of the Roosevelt Administration. The views of the athletic department and the administrators ultimately trumped the educational extension mission of the radio pioneers—a mission perceived as a challenge to the status quo. This study found several reasons for the decline of university broadcasts of college football and the rise of commercially sponsored broadcasts. Responsibility is shared by government regulators, the commercial radio industry, intercollegiate athletic organizations, university administrators, and listeners.

First and foremost, the decline of sports broadcasting on educational stations can be attributed to economic and regulatory factors. In some cases, stations closed for lack of funding or interest on the part of the college or university. In other instances, the blame for station closures can be placed squarely at the feet of the Federal Radio Commission (FRC). The precursor of the FCC, the FRC did not give university broadcasters the channel and power assignments that would have made them viable.\(^{13}\) Even stations such as Ohio State’s WEAO and Wisconsin’s WHA, which had diversified programming, solid infrastructure, and appreciative audiences, were not considered for clear channel status or other optimal positioning on the electromagnetic spectrum. Sports broadcasts had created some of the university stations’ most loyal listeners. When signals from larger, more powerful, or politically better connected stations

interfered with those broadcasts, listeners complained. The solution that derived from the FRC’s policies was not to give university broadcasters better channel assignments, but to have those broadcasters with the better assignments carry football play-by-play. That policy did not appear to trouble most sports fans.\(^\text{14}\)

A second factor was the capacity of commercial radio stations to take their case to the public, not just through their own airwaves but also in the pages of the newspapers that were often part of the same media enterprise.\(^\text{15}\) Commercial broadcasters positioned themselves as the defenders of the public’s right to hear broadcasts of sports events held at taxpayer-supported institutions. In 1935, when Ohio State chose to limit its in-state broadcasts to its own University station and one other commercial station, radio and print media blasted the decision as an infringement of the First Amendment rights of broadcasters. They equated football games with news events and maintained that they had an equal right to present the play-by-play to their audience. They also orchestrated a letter-writing campaign so that football fans could pressure the University to change its policy. However, wrapping themselves in a constitutional mantle was not typical of commercial broadcasters. More often, they argued that football—far from a legitimate news event—was merely entertainment and that they knew more about entertainment than their university counterparts. In effect, they criticized educational radio for having bland content that did not appeal to the public while arguing that they were the rightful vehicle for college football—the one programming element on educational radio that had truly mass appeal.

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\(^{14}\) As one example, the University of Minnesota received a plea on behalf of citizens of the town of Luverne to arrange to have its basketball broadcasts carried over a commercial station rather than the University’s WLB. The radio committee authorized its chairman to reply that while aware of the reception problems in Luverne, WLB was a better channel than the suggested commercial station. The problem was due to interference from a commercial station in Council Bluffs, Iowa. See: Memorandum: Radio Broadcasting Committee, 16 January 1932. Comptroller Records, 1877-1970, Box 9, Radio Broadcasting, 1925-1942, University Archives, Andersen Library, University of Minnesota.

\(^{15}\) By 1933, 13% of broadcast licenses were held by newspapers. Their use of the airwaves to promote their print media is evident in call letters such as WTMJ (The Milwaukee Journal) and the Chicago Tribune’s WGN (World’s Greatest Newspaper). See: Christopher H. Sterling and J.M. Kittross, \textit{Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting}, 3rd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), p.116.
Third, the expansion of government in the Roosevelt administration, and especially the
tendency toward greater regulation of industry, rattled some of the more conservative figures in
intercollegiate sports. The voters’ rejection of the pro-business Herbert Hoover, coming on the
heels of the 1929 Carnegie Foundation Report, prompted fears of regulation that would lead to
“socialized athletics.” The ferocity with which they countered any hint of reining in athletics
may have helped to tip the balance toward increased commercialization of football. Big Ten
Commissioner Griffith was particularly outspoken in his defense of big-time football. Typical of
his bombast was a speech delivered in 1932, in which he drew upon his own experience in the
World War to praise those who were not “afraid of big things:”

We emerged from the War toughened in mind and body and heart. We were not afraid of
anything then. We were not afraid of big stadia, big crowds, big spectacles…Football
exemplified many of the attributes of fighting and working…[but] the American people
listened to the prophets of senility and softness and worried for fear their boys would be
overworked or for fear they would not be paid for entertaining others….then we became
frightened at the thought and sight of large stadia, of large crowds and of large gate
receipts.17

Griffith attacked as “weaklings” those who expected others to help them, and he counseled them
to embrace the “spirit of the football field” where “every player is expected to take care of his
own assignment.”18 He used his platform as the Big Ten Commissioner—and from 1933 to 1937
as the president of the NCAA—to extol the virtues of football, justify the expansion and
commercialization of athletics, and deride the New Deal programs that sought to address social
welfare. A similar rhetoric of good, clean competition as the “American way” was echoed in the
radio debates. When educational broadcasters lobbied for a reservation of channels for non-profit

16 John L. Griffith, "Socialized Athletics: Address to the Northwestern and Stanford Alumni the
Evening of the Football Game between These Two Universities", 14 October 1933. Director of Athletics,
RG 9/e-1/10, Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith and St. John), 1933,
TOSUA.
17 John L. Griffith to Intercollegiate Faculty Athletic Directors, "Excerpts from the Speech
Delivered January 20th, 1932 at Waterloo, Iowa," 13 January 1932. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10,
Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner: Memoranda: 1929-1933, TOSUA.
18 Ibid.
stations, they were derided for demanding a hand-out rather than competing for audiences by adding “showmanship” to their programming. The industry publication *Broadcast Advertising* summed up that attitude in a 1933 article in which it claimed that the FRC’s record showed “that educational stations by and large are misfits in American broadcasting commanding little financial support from their own institutions and having negligible listener appeal.”

Fourth, university presidents, who were perhaps the only ones with the power to rein in athletics, declined to buck the trend toward commercialization due to disinterest or pressure from their alumni and athletic departments, or to the uses they could make within the university community of the proceeds from football. There were a few exceptions. Chicago’s Hutchins dealt with the problem in 1939 by urging his Board of Trustees to abolish a football program that had become legendary under Coach Amos Alonzo Stagg. (Hutchins was also in the forefront of the movement to forge cooperative agreements between higher education and commercial stations in lieu of independently-licensed educational broadcasters.) In 1935, Minnesota’s president pleaded with his Big Ten cohorts to spurn sponsored football broadcasts, a message that was largely ignored not only by other Big Ten presidents but by his own university. He also suggested that if commercialization was inevitable that the proceeds should support educational radio or other

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19 For example, journalist Heywood Broun maintained that there was no reason why “showmanship and entertainment might not be mixed with Kant, Karl Marx, Beethoven and Herbert Spencer.” Broun was a founder of station WEVD (whose call letters memorialized the Socialist leader Eugene V. Debs) which had its own Air College. Broun believed that some scholarly efforts were wasted because professorial delivery on the radio could be “as dry as the desert sands.” See: Orrin E. Dunlap, Jr., "Radio—the Flash Educator," *New York Times*, February 5, 1933, p. X10.


21 Robin Lester, *Stagg's University: The Rise, Decline, and Fall of Big-Time Football at Chicago* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995). In Chapter 6, in particular, Lester details the events that enabled Hutchins to make a convincing case for the elimination of football. These included several consecutive losing seasons which began to impact gate receipts and a “New Plan” instituted in Hutchins’ administration that among other things, repealed a “physical culture” requirement, raised the entrance requirements, eliminated a physical education major, and reduced the financial aid available to athletes. In short, it stymied efforts to recruit top athletes who were more interested in football than in education. Under these circumstances, it became clear to the Board of Trustees that Chicago football could never be competitive in the commercialized environment of the Big Ten.
academic pursuits rather than being plowed back into athletics. Other presidents appeared to be troubled by the growing “ballyhoo,” but they may not have cared to engage in a struggle that might pit them against their coaches, athletic directors, and alumni, particularly as the Depression forced them to deal with other, more pressing issues. It might also be the case that despite their vocal opposition to commercialization, they simply did not care enough to force the issue. They understood that football broadcasts attracted more notice to their schools than their academic accomplishments. Amid the drastic state funding cuts in the Depression years, presidents counted on radio publicity to maintain the prominence of their institutions. So while they professed their opposition to the increasing commercialization of football, they took no action to prevent commercial broadcasts. With no group of authoritative figures in the academic structure to argue against sponsored broadcasts, educational stations could not maintain control of their own sports programming.

Finally, listeners who had expressed preferences for advertising-free radio in the 1920s, may have become inured to commercials or convinced by industry insistence that advertising was the quid pro quo of “free radio.” Some football reformers counted on the public’s disgust with radio advertising to ratchet down the rising level of commercialization. New York University Professor Phillip O. Badger, who chaired NYU’s Board of Athletic Control, predicted that collegiate football would be dead by 1942 in the absence of reforms to preserve its amateur status. “I refer to commercial broadcasts in which coaches and institutions trade on the good names of colleges with all the glory and glamour of their athletic control,” he told the members of the Mid Atlantic States Collegiate Athletic Association in 1935. That did not happen. The relative dearth of complaints from sports fans in a system that purported to be driven by the

public’s needs and desires was interpreted by the radio industry as evidence that a commercial model of broadcasting did not need to accommodate educational channels.

Each of these five factors worked to the disadvantage of university radio stations. However, this study identified aspects that helped at least two universities—Wisconsin and Ohio State—to continue their athletic broadcasting. At both of these institutions, support for radio was widespread, and a broad cross-section of the faculty was routinely tapped to contribute to programming. This created awareness both of the station itself and the vast potential of radio in general. These universities actively promoted radio as an electronic extension agent and football as a university offering worth of extension. Yet sports was but one genre in a full and diverse slate of programs. Ohio State’s “School of the Air” provided a national model of coursework delivered via the airwaves. Its Institute for Education by Radio (IER) studied the feasibility and worked through the obstacles of teaching in the “ether.” Similarly, Wisconsin’s “School of the Air” and “College of the Air” demonstrated radio’s potential to deliver the expertise of top-ranked teachers and researchers to the tiniest schoolrooms and the most remote farmsteads.24 These instructional programs gave Wisconsin and Ohio State the educational bona fides that distinguished them as obvious and valuable alternatives to commercial radio. More so than other educational broadcasters, they could justify some academically light-weight programs such as athletics in their schedules without betraying their deeper commitment to programming that did not have a place on commercial radio.

By contrast, Penn State had little faculty buy-in beyond the radio enthusiasts in the electrical engineering department. While it did offer lectures and programs for farmers and homemakers, it did not attempt to create formal curricula for radio. Absent that obvious educational aspect, Penn State’s administration may not have wanted to emphasize football

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broadcasting as the station’s distinctive feature even though it was probably the most popular one with listeners. This was in keeping with stalwart supporters of non-commercial radio nationally who often seemed to marginalize sports broadcasting as if it did not quite deserve to be mentioned in discussions concerning the educational potential of the electronic medium. It may be the case that the controversy regarding intercollegiate athletics made educators reluctant to spotlight sports on their radio schedules. According to a 1933 study of land-grant colleges and state universities, sports was shown to comprise 3.2% of the programming schedules. This meant that more time was devoted to sports than to formal school instruction (2.5%) or weather reports (1.8%), and yet the latter two were frequently highlighted in arguments supporting the allocation of radio channels to educational broadcasters.25 In the public hearings and national conferences that took place in the 1930s, the failure to note sports presentations among their accomplishments or as part of their long term strategies suggests that university broadcasters may have been conflicted about the educational status of college football. Even at Ohio State and Wisconsin, football broadcasts were generally listed last in programming reports under the category of “miscellaneous” or “entertainment.” Nonetheless, with the research to confirm the public’s appreciation for athletics, these schools went to extra lengths to provide a quality listening experience for their audience. At Ohio State, for example, listeners could request that the station send them “grid graph charts” to enable the homebound fan to record yardage, downs, penalties, and points.26

Another factor in the success of educational radio stations that has been noted by Hugh Richard Slotten was a cordial working relationship between state government and university

administrations. Both Ohio State and Wisconsin, which were conveniently located in their respective state capitals, assiduously courted their local, state and federal lawmakers. In addition to offering perks such as tickets to football games, the universities offered public officials something far more valuable—air time on their stations. When a new administration took control of the state government in 1933, Ohio State’s Vice President sent the following notice to the Attorney General, the State Supreme Court Justice, and each of the new department heads:

You may be familiar with the fact that the State of Ohio maintains as part of the Ohio State University radio broadcasting station, WEAO, with a very large listener clientele covering practically the whole state of Ohio. Doubtless also you know that various state departments have from time to time presented interesting programs over this station—publicizing and explaining to the citizens of the State the work and importance and the value of their services...The University is very anxious that the station should serve just these purposes and that it may help in interpreting to the public the scope and service of the State government.

The cultivation of close ties between the state government and the university is one reason why WEAO and WHA survived. At various times in their battles with the FRC, prominent political leaders, including the respective states’ Attorneys General, came to the stations’ defense. Their experiences also suggest that programs with mass appeal such as football broadcasts may have helped to solidify support for radio stations that catered primarily to more specific or eclectic tastes. College and university administrators certainly did not oppose entertainment on their airwaves. Tyler’s study found that presidents of land-grant institutions believed their schools had an obligation to use radio in connection with their extension activities. Entertainment programs such as football could “lighten the monotony of farm life.” More than 70 percent of those he interviewed said that broadcasting of athletic events was “a desirable means of gaining favorable

28 For example, Morrill’s file from 1935 includes a folder marked “Ticket Requests” that contains requests from members of the Ohio legislature, attorneys, a banker, and the head of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company. See: Athletics: J.L. Morrill, 3/f-2/2, TOSUA.
attention for their institution.”  

Furthermore, administrators said they were willing to pick up the tab. As Tyler noted, “Several administrators point out that broadcasting is a part of the educational service of the institution and should be financed by the regular appropriations.” He quoted others who cautioned against “entangling alliances” and other “undesirable effects of commercial sponsorship of educational programs.”

College radio directors likewise believed that lighter fare was necessary both to attract listeners to the public service programming and provide relief in between more ponderous programs.

While the University of Wisconsin and the Ohio State University both maintained their athletic broadcasts, they each shaped unique economic models of educational radio broadcasting. Ohio State’s radio station was a separate department in the University structure and a line item in the annual budget. As its athletic broadcasts assumed greater significance, however, the Athletic Association contributed money from its gate receipts and commercial contracts to defray the costs of broadcasting football and basketball games. Even when Ohio State began selling the broadcast rights to football games, it continued to air a non-commercial account on its own radio station and funded the football coverage through the broadcast privilege fees it assessed on commercial radio.

Wisconsin’s radio station was operated by the University as a state-wide enterprise. For most of the years covered in this dissertation, Wisconsin radio received its funding directly from the state.

Critics of public broadcasting have cited the 1920s and 30s as a missed opportunity when proponents of educational radio failed to engage the public they sought to serve and instead, took an elitist, paternalistic approach to programming their stations. However, this study also found that both Wisconsin and Ohio State were in fact committed to involving their listeners and eliciting their preferences through surveys and other forms of audience research. WHA began

31 Ibid., p.43.
32 Ibid., p.73.
33 “Educational Radio Broadcasting,” April 1923. Harold B. McCarty Papers, Box 49, Folder 8, WSHS.
34 Laurie Ouelette, How Public TV Failed the People (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
radio research as early as 1923 to ascertain where the station’s signal could be heard. Program director William H. Lighty composed a listener map based on more than 800 responses from listeners who had heard Badger basketball broadcasts over a two month period.35 As early as 1925, Ohio State’s station had an ombudsman of sorts who criticized “the musical and educational programs from the point of view of the public.”36 In its 1930 program guide, WEAO invited listeners to become “regular reporters” by recording their impressions of the quality and usefulness of programs “to determine what the people want to hear.”37 The audiences’ clear appreciation for athletic broadcasts was no doubt a factor in the decision of these two universities to keep college sports on the air even when their games were aired simultaneously by commercial broadcasters. In this regard, they used audience feedback in much the same way that commercial stations used ratings. The difference was that the educators sought to advance and publicize their institution and its outreach mission rather than maximize profits. The decision by WOSU and WHA to offer their football broadcasts to commercial stations was consistent with both their public service missions and their public relations goals of enlarging access to games and creating new communities of fans and supporters. Ultimately, however, those policies served to undermine educational radio as a viable and logical carrier of college athletics by underscoring the separate status of football as a quasi-educational activity that was no more or less at home on campus radio stations than in the profit-oriented environment of commercial radio. In addition, at a time when most audience research consisted of letters to stations or sponsors, educational radio gave away its best bargaining chip that otherwise might have been used to press for better channel assignments.

35 “WHA-9XM Typical Range,” 1923. Harold A. Engel Papers, Box 14, M87-133, WSHS.
37 WEAO Radio Program, No. 4, 1 January 1930. Information Files, WEAO (OSU): 1922-1933, TOSUA.
Along with case studies of Ohio State and Wisconsin, the inclusion of the Pennsylvania State University in this dissertation is warranted because it illustrates the far more common path taken by educational radio at big-time football schools in the 1930s. Confronted by declining revenue in the Depression era, increasing pressure from commercial broadcasters, and most of all, incessant and costly demands from the FRC, a majority of educational institutions simply folded their radio operations.38 By the end of the 1930s, as the nation was emerging from Depression and the battle for control of radio had been clinched by commercial broadcasters, football programs such as Penn State’s returned to the airwaves—mostly on network-affiliated stations under the sponsorship of commercial interests.

Methods

These case studies use primarily historical methods. The first step was to gain a deep familiarization with the issues and time period under consideration through survey histories of the era as well as specific histories of intercollegiate athletics, public higher education, and the invention and diffusion of radio. Supplementing the context of this project were biographical works on Hoover and Roosevelt, as well as studies that focused on a range of more narrow but salient issues including rural life in the 1920s and 1930s, the evolution of physical education, the Great Depression, the Second Red Scare, the Press-Radio War, and the New Deal initiatives. It was also important to read histories of the individual institutions. Since each of the institutions was a member of the Big Ten at the time of this study, histories were readily available through interlibrary loans. I also read histories of each school’s football programs. Although these were useful for providing historical context and acquainting me with some of the major figures in athletics, the sports histories tended to be written by loyal alumni for loyal alumni. The

38 S.E. Frost, Jr., Education's Own Stations (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), pp. 3-5.
A celebratory approach they took to college football privileged a narrative of gridiron heroics and record book statistics rather than a critical analysis of the serious issues that were rocking the college sports world at the time. That gap was filled by newspaper accounts, muck-raking magazine articles, NCAA conference proceedings, and by various studies commissioned to address the perceived abuses in intercollegiate athletics.

The raw materials of these case studies were the primary sources mined in the archives of the three institutions involved along with one state historical archive. Of most interest to this project were the extant copies of correspondence, memoranda, and speeches attributed to each institution’s president, coaches, athletic director, and radio personnel. I also examined correspondence among members of the Big Ten conference, and letters from alumni and radio listeners. The latter helped to confirm the popularity of sports broadcasting with the audience which provided the subsequent commitment of radio directors to provide game coverage of intercollegiate athletics.

Given the diverse topics that this study drew upon and the various institutional personnel whose files I wanted to examine, it was important to establish some parameters for focusing each case study. I began with Penn State because its proximity allowed me to work through the process of collecting the necessary information. I contacted the archivist with an introductory letter detailing the thrust and scope of my project as well as a fairly broad list of subjects that I was interested in exploring. Over the course of several face-to-face meetings, we jointly arrived at a prioritized list of the most promising archival materials. Because Penn State’s archives were not as extensive as Ohio State’s and Wisconsin’s, I was compelled to dig deeper and continually cast a wider net. As often happens in historical research, I followed many paths that came to dead ends while occasionally stumbling upon an unexpected piece of information that sent me off in promising new directions.
My experience with the Penn State archives helped me to hone in on the specific collections that would be likely to prove most useful at the other archives where I would need to budget my time and resources more carefully. Several weeks before my planned visits to Wisconsin and Ohio State, I contacted the archivists as I had done at Penn State. In each case, they provided me with long lists, via e-mail, of potential collections for examination. By making use of on-line materials, such as archived copies of the *Chicago Tribune* and Board of Regents minutes from the University of Wisconsin, I was able to cull the extensive list of materials from each school. As I had allocated just five days at each site, this pre-planning enabled me to begin work immediately upon my arrival at each location where the archivists had boxes of materials waiting for me. In the evenings, after the archives were closed, I made use of each institution’s library (using a guest access pass provided by the archivists) to scan archived local newspapers of the era as well as alumni publications, student newspapers, and other local documents. The history contained herein emerged from this combination of primary and secondary sources.

Along with the historical methods used, this project draws upon the body of scholarship known as critical political economy which critiques the power structures in capitalist societies. The foundation of critical political economy is comprised of analyses of at least three components of social systems: structures (such as networks), cultural values, and human agency. This insistence on examining the social totality of issues and events is one of the main features that distinguish critical political economy from mainstream neoclassical economics. Rather than singling out economics as an objective field of study that can be analyzed in isolation, critical political economy is concerned with the historical, social, political, and cultural contexts. Therefore, this study begins with the assumption that there is a significant and systematic relationship between political and economic processes and that any attempt to study either one in isolation is certain to miss half the story. For example, the demise of educational radio is often blamed on the economic hardship brought on by the Depression when the number of educational
broadcast licenses dropped from a high point of 202 to just 38 between 1926 and 1937.\(^{39}\) It might seem logical to presume that universities chose a commercial route for sports broadcasts both because their public media outlets had disappeared and because they needed the revenue stream. However, this ignores the layers of decisions and value judgments that left football intact—despite a somewhat contentious claim to educational purpose—while educational radio slid into near oblivion despite its proven capacity to extend the educational mission of the public university to the masses.

The study proceeds with the premise that under capitalism the status quo is perceived as the societal norm even though that “norm” has been defined by dominant groups whose privileged positions in the political and economic framework depend upon their own maintenance of control.\(^{40}\) This concept is generally described as hegemony, a sociopolitical condition in which the ideology of the status quo is widely diffused throughout society and culture due to the dominant class’s access to and influence in the fundamental institutions such as mass media, education, government, religion, and business.\(^{41}\) In the 1930s, Radio Corporation of America

\(^{39}\) Ibid.

\(^{40}\) See: Robert W. McChesney, Telecommunications, Mass Media & Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). In this history of early broadcasting in the United States, McChesney documented public media’s missed chance at securing their own channels. He attributed the decline of educational radio in general to the losing battle waged on behalf of non-commercial broadcasting in the 1920s and 1930s. He maintained that the Communications Act of 1934, which provided for government oversight of broadcasting, gave monopolistic control of the airwaves to those broadcasters with the greatest profit-making potential. Central to the capitalist ideology that informed the Communications Act was the rhetoric that defined the free market system as “the American Way.” Such rhetoric ran counter to the progressive notion of public service advocated by proponents of educational broadcasting. However, the Federal Radio Commission (FRC), the agency that regulated radio from 1927-1934, persisted in siding with the commercial industry by categorizing educational radio as a propagandistic or special interest broadcast in the same vein as labor, religion, or the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). According to the FRC’s logic, since there was not enough spectrum space for every special interest, the most equitable distribution of the airwaves should favor “general purpose” or commercial broadcasters.

\(^{41}\) Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Norwell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971). The theory of hegemony was popularized by Gramsci, an Italian social philosopher whose writings, while confined by Mussolini to a Fascist prison between 1926 and his death in 1937, were later published. Gramsci’s work was followed by Raymond Williams in the 1970s and 1980s who applied the concept of cultural hegemony to his study of television. See: Raymond Williams, Television: Technology and Cultural Form (London: Routledge, 1974).
(RCA) President David Sarnoff used his substantial political clout and economic influence to create and reinforce the notion that the marketplace model was the natural “American system of broadcasting.” By contrast, he said, educational radio, funded by taxpayers and overseen by state institutions, was fraught with censorship and bureaucracy. Any threat to a commercial system, he said, was a threat to “free speech, free press, freedom of worship, and freedom of education.”

At a time when capitalism was under assault, labor unions were gaining strength, and socialism was drawing new adherents, Sarnoff and other “captains of industry” maintained that private commercial support was the only guarantor of independent media and deserved the support of “all who would preserve the free values of American life.” Their assumptions were grounded in the classical economic theory of Adam Smith. His landmark treatise of 1776, *Wealth of Nations*, declared the invisible hand of the marketplace to be the most efficient means of promoting social welfare and the best defense from government intrusion. Critical political economy, however, also differs from neoclassical economics in its emphasis on the moral dimension to human affairs. As noted by Golding and Murdock, two pioneers in the field of critical political economy, “It goes beyond technical issues of efficiency to engage with basic moral questions of justice, equity and the public good.”

Roosevelt’s election is sometimes interpreted as a rejection of the calloused indifference of capitalism in favor of a leader genuinely concerned about the welfare of his people. Where Herbert Hoover insisted that the rugged individualism of the American character would prevail, Roosevelt proposed unprecedented government aid to the elderly, the needy, struggling farmers,

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43 Ibid., p.155.


and disadvantaged laborers.\textsuperscript{46} When it came to radio, however, Roosevelt both supported and was supported by the national corporate radio interests. He allowed them to set the industry standards and to regulate themselves under the watchful eye of a federal agency comprised almost exclusively of their own members.\textsuperscript{47} In return, they gave him \textit{carte blanche} access to the airwaves. CBS vice president Henry Bellows had offered to make the network’s facilities available to the president. Shortly after Roosevelt took office, Bellows was quoted in the Chicago Tribune as offering as promising to “limit broadcasts of public events and discussion of public questions [that are] contrary to the policies of the United States government.”\textsuperscript{48} Incredibly, industry officials did not appear to comprehend that such fawning offers of cooperation constituted a dangerous form of censorship that posed a threat to democracy by stifling free and open debate and criticism of government. Roosevelt’s mastery of the new medium, abetted by the networks’ compliancy, enabled him to win public support for his New Deal—and three subsequent re-elections—by speaking directly to the American people. (Educational broadcasters were no less supportive when it came to the New Deal. When a division chief from the National Recovery Administration asked WHA’s program director Harold McCarty for his support in molding public opinion in support of Roosevelt’s Recovery Campaign in 1933, McCarty responded, “You may depend upon us for full support in the use of our broadcasting facilities for

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{46} A rich and growing body of scholarship deals with the import of Roosevelt’s election. Among the works consulted for this study were: Steve Neal, \textit{Happy Days Are Here Again: The 1932 Democratic Convention, the Emergence of FDR--and How America Was Changed Forever} (New York: William Morrow, 2004). And Donald A. Ritchie, \textit{ELECTING FDR: THE NEW DEAL CAMPAIGN OF 1932} (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas 2007).

\textsuperscript{47} Dennis W. Mazzocco, "Radio’s New Deal: The NRA and U.S. Broadcasting, 1933-1935," \textit{Journal of Radio Studies} 12 (2005), pp.32-46. The original five members of the FRC included a Commerce Department official, an editor for McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, the manager of a commercial radio station, a Navy admiral, and a state Supreme Court judge. All of them had been hand-picked by Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover for their support of his policies which were largely continued in the Roosevelt Administration as was the practice of filling the agency with pro-industry commissioners.

\textsuperscript{48} Arthur Sears Henning, "Radio Chains Seek 'Stand-in' at White House," \textit{Chicago Tribune}, May 13, 1934, p.1. According to the reporter, Bellows and Roosevelt had been friends since they were classmates at Harvard in the early years of the century. Their friendship and Bellows’ early support for Roosevelt’s presidential candidacy gave CBS an advantage over NBC in the new administration.}
the success of President Roosevelt’s recovery program….The state of Wisconsin is glad to make use of its own radio resources in such a worthy cause.”

The president’s open embrace of commercial broadcasting may have tempered his support of educational radio. Even First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt chose a commercial route. In December of 1932, she was featured on a regular Friday night program on NBC-WEAF that was sponsored by Pond’s, a cold cream popular with women. In addition, the Roosevelt’s son Elliott got into the commercial radio business following his father’s election. In 1936, at the age of 28, he was named vice president of the Hearst Radio chain and became president of two Texas broadcast companies. Further, as Broadcasting Magazine noted, even members of Roosevelt’s “Brain Trust” understood advertising to be the progeny of industry and expected commercial radio to “lead [the] fight on under-consumption” as a way out of depression.

For the most part, the industry chiefs who influenced the FRC rejected any notion that challenged an unfettered marketplace. In choosing free markets as the sole determinant of radio’s development, they did not consider the human needs that might be served by alternative systems of broadcast. Although proponents of the status quo acknowledged the existence of alternative systems, they generally condemned them as un-American, a powerful charge in the 1930s.

On the spectrum of non-commercial broadcasting in the early years of the electronic media one extreme was represented by the increasingly repressive government-run radio of Germany. As early as 1933, Adolf Hitler’s use of the airwaves to promote Nazi ideology had become a cautionary tale of what could happen in the United States if radio were not left to the

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49 Frank R. Wilson to Station WHA, 22 July 1933. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 General Correspondence Box 2, 1926-1933: 017, Steenbock Library. H.B. McCarty to Frank R. Wilson, 2 August 1933. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 Box 2, General Correspondence, 1926-1933: 017, Steenbock Library.

50 According to the radio trade magazine, she was paid for her performances but donated the money to charity. See: "Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt," Broadcast Advertising, Vol. 3, No.12, December 15, 1932, p.10.


marketplace. One news commentator from a Springfield, Missouri station noted that all news
dispatches emanating from Germany carried the official stamp of the Hitler regime. Under the
“American system” of broadcasting, by contrast, he said, “the federal government has not yet
been given the power to censor radio programs or to maintain federal broadcasting stations on
preferred channels, to force-feed the American public on propaganda of the administration in
power.” The highly successful British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) which was funded
primarily by a tax on radio sets was considered no more palatable. In 1936, FCC Chairman
Anning S. Prall alluded to the BBC when he proclaimed that “American listeners would not stand
for the payment of a receiving-set tax. It is my judgment that it would be most unpopular in this
country. It is not the American way of accomplishing things.”

However, higher education in the United States did in fact offer an alternative “American
Way” of broadcasting—one grounded in the educational, informational, and entertainment
resources of the Academy and funded in the manner of extension projects of the land-grant
colleges and universities which were uniquely American institutions. The system advocated by
educators rejected the marketplace model and drew instead upon theories of participatory
democracy. Educational radio, it was argued, could provide a diversity of programming, the
informational resources to promote an informed citizenry, and a platform for a multitude of
voices and perspectives. North Dakota Senator Edwin F. Ladd captured the sense of promise that
educational broadcasting held for democracy in a folksy example:

In the not distant future, the farmer will no longer need to hitch up Old Dobbin or crank
up his tin Lizzie, bundle in his wife and all the members of the family and then drive
thirty or forty miles to hear a proponent or opponent of his political belief discuss the
complex questions of the day. He will be able to sit at ease by his own fireside and have
the pleasure of hearing at first hand the representative men of the country analyze the

54 Anning S. Prall, "National Association of Educational Broadcasters: Proceedings of the First
National Conference in Washington, DC " in *National Association of Educational Broadcasters*, ed. C.S.
distinctive principles of the different political parties. The universal use of radio will have a leveling effect on the social order.55

It is important to note that educational broadcasters did not seek to supplant or replace commercial broadcasters. Rather, they aimed to provide a service that would supplement the commercial-driven entertainment of the radio networks. C.A. Wright, a professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering and the first station director of WEAO, articulated what may have been one of the earliest justifications for educational radio in response to an inquiry from his counterpart at Lawrence College in 1925:

We believe broadcasting to be a natural university function, and a permanent one here, because, one, it increases the prestige of the university and its faculty. Two, it provides valuable particular services such as market and weather reports more reliably than other agencies. Three, it maintains contact with schools of the state and with alumni. Four, it provides educational lectures which are valuable. Five, it furnishes types of entertainment which are not furnished by other agencies such as musical and athletic broadcasting.56

Ultimately, however, educational broadcasters were unable to convince their deeply entrenched and well-heeled corporate rivals that there was room for both commercial and non-commercial radio on the electromagnetic spectrum. Despite the industry’s lofty rhetoric that equated the free market with freedom, the primary objective of radio in the United States became turning a profit rather than providing a public service. The question of which broadcasting system was best positioned to deliver college football to the masses was bound up with these competing theoretical perspectives and with evolving notions of public education, mass athletics, and the role of sports on a college campus.

This study found evidence that while educators, including those at the helms of radio stations, could rationalize the delivery of football broadcasts as a public service, the athletic departments were more inclined to accept football broadcasts, at least tacitly, as a business

proposition. But even the athletic departments were interested less in profits than in publicity. Unlike the situation in television two decades later, the concept of “home rule” prevailed in radio. “Home-rule” typically referred to the responsibility of each institution or conference to form and enforce its own policies to uphold the amateur ideal. That same principle guided the approach to radio broadcasting with the NCAA never taking a firm position on behalf of its members. Absent an oligopoly such as the television control that emerged in the 1950s, most colleges and universities did not earn substantial revenue from the sale of broadcast privileges, at least not compared to their gate receipts. However, the publicity those broadcasts generated was significant. Radio could create the buzz that filled the ever-expanding stadiums which resulted in fatter profits at the gate.

It is no accident that each of the case studies in this dissertation represents a land-grant institution. Land-grant schools with big-time football programs are compelling sites for political economy research because they attempt to straddle the divide between public service and free markets. While charged with fiscal responsibility for spending tax, tuition, and endowment dollars wisely, they are chartered to provide quality education, not to accrue capital. Nonetheless, they are beholden to the state for their support which in turn, depends upon corporate well being to fill its coffers. The conflicted status of land-grant institutions may be most apparent in the area of athletics. Certainly, U.S. courts have perceived the public/private schism as they have issued often contradictory rulings regarding the relationship between the commerciality of athletics and the tax-exempt status enjoyed by universities as non-profit organizations.57

McChesney, Leach, and others have detailed the policy debates that took place among government, industry, and non-profit organizations such as the National Committee on Education

by Radio (NCER), which argued for a protected space on the broadcast band for educational radio, and the National Advisory Council of Radio in Education (NACRE) which believed that commercial radio would provide adequate broadcast time for education as part of its public service responsibility. Other scholars have examined the discussions within the NCAA that shaped radio and television policies on intercollegiate athletics. Smith, notably, explored the NCAA’s experimental control of televised football in the 1950s and the court-ordered break-up of the NCAA monopoly in the 1980s. Although representatives of individual universities participated in discussions of media on a national level, the policy discussions that took place internally have been less thoroughly examined. This dissertation begins to fill that gap with a look at the interplay among university personnel and governing boards, national organizations, alumni, and legislators as pivotal decisions on sports and broadcasting were put into effect with long term repercussions.

The importance of examining these sources is clear. University presidents have guided the national debates on intercollegiate athletics from the late 19th century. Some, such as Charles Eliot, the president of Harvard in the late 19th century, and Hutchins of Chicago in the 20th century, have left long public records of speeches, letters, and administrative action that fully articulate their thinking. The same can be said of the most renowned coaches—Walter Camp of Yale and Chicago’s Stagg, for example. But in countless other institutions around the country, less prominent presidents, coaches, and faculty wrestled with the dilemma of intercollegiate sports and media, and they devised approaches fitted to their particular circumstances. The archival records of these individuals provide evidence of the policy discussions and administrative actions—and inaction—that contributed to our current system of broadcast, the growth of intercollegiate athletics, and the commercialization of the modern university.
Review of Literature

A review of the literature found nothing that directly addresses the relationship between collegiate sports and university-licensed public media. The absence of a relationship was touched upon by Smith who noted that “there was never a concerted effort by universities to tie athletics into educational functions by broadcasting games over their own public radio and television stations.”58 This study, in building upon Smith’s work, also draws upon the broader scholarship on collegiate athletics and public media in search of areas of intersection.

Of the early historical accounts of college sports that inform this project, the most important is Smith’s *Sports and Freedom* which traces the rise of big-time college sports from its roots in the Cambridge-Oxford competitions of the 17th century through the early crew meets of an emerging industrial America to the establishment of the NCAA.59 Smith provides critical insights on the concept of amateurism as it developed in a relatively egalitarian American society as opposed to the British model in which amateur athletic participation was a privilege of wealth and class. This provides an important benchmark for the shift in values as amateurism was continually redefined throughout the 20th century to match the rhetoric with the reality. Sack and Staurowsky pick up Smith’s thread beginning in the mid-20th century with an examination of the NCAA’s increasingly spurious defense of the educational purpose of big-time college sports. Their critique details the shift of intercollegiate athletics from sport as leisure to sport as employment. Important NCAA rulings in the 1950s and 1960s gradually increased the subsidization of collegiate athletes. By the 1970s, with the increasing exposure and revenue provided by television, the NCAA undid most of the remaining regulations aimed at preserving the integrity of an athlete’s educational experience. Yet even as big-time athletes came to

resemble employees hired to entertain sports fans, legislators, the courts, and the media continued to embrace the myth that athletes are amateurs. They conclude that the amateur myth, perpetuated by the NCAA, “has exploited athletes financially, has undermined education integrity, and has transformed some of America’s most prestigious universities into centers of fraud and hypocrisy.”

John R. Thelins’ *Games Colleges Play* addresses the controversies that roiled college sports in the decades following the creation of the NCAA. Particularly noteworthy is Thelins’ examination of several commissioned studies of college sports and the proposed reforms that resulted. Of special interest to this study is Thelin’s treatment of the 1929 Carnegie Report on college sports which stimulated discussion at each of the institutions in the case studies covered in this project. John S. Watterson’s *College Football* provides a comprehensive history of the sport spanning a century. Watterson examines the “professionalization” of college football in the 1920s when coaches’ salaries skyrocketed and student-athletes benefitted from a variety of subsidies. He also touches upon the lure of radio broadcasting contracts as a source of revenue in the Depression era and the slow decline of any meaningful definition of amateurism. Benjamin G. Rader’s *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports* places football into the full panoply of athletics. He touches on the development of a sporting culture beginning in Puritan times, and he explores organized athletics from many angles ranging from the corruption, commercialization, and exclusionary traditions that have plagued it to the role of sports in creating a sense of identity, community, and integration in an industrial and pluralistic society. Among the other historical studies that shed light on the evolution of collegiate sports

into a corporate enterprise is Paul R. Lawrence’s *Unsportsmanlike Conduct: The National Collegiate Athletic Association and the Business of College Football*. Although Lawrence confines the media examination of his study to television, he provides a penetrating look at the evolution of the NCAA into a monopoly, the roots of which can be found in Big Ten Commissioner (and on a three-year rotational basis, NCAA President) Major John L. Griffith’s efforts to negotiate a conference-wide radio contract in the 1930s. Murray Sperber’s *Shake Down the Thunder: The Creation of Notre Dame Football* exposes the internal tensions between Notre Dame’s legendary coach Knute Rockne and the school’s administrators and faculty who became increasingly concerned with the emphasis on football in the 1920s. Sperber argues that there were opportunities when intercollegiate football could have chosen a less commercial path in the mold of the Ivy Leagues. Sperber’s extensive use of Notre Dame’s archival materials, especially the Knute Rockne papers, illustrates how primary source materials can contribute to a greater understanding of the truth behind American myths.

One outgrowth of these historical critiques is a subset of literature addressing media and sports. Rader finds sharp distinctions in the purpose, practice, and payoffs of sports in the pre- and post-television eras in his work *In Its Own Image: How Television Has Transformed Sports*. He argues that in the interest of maintaining viewer interest and maximizing profits, television “has diminished the capacity of sports to furnish heroes, to bind communities, and to enact the rituals that contain, and exalt, society’s traditional values.” Interestingly, those were some of the very reasons that land-grant institutions put forth to justify the role of athletics on the college campus and later, on the airwaves of educational radio stations. Smith also touches on that theme in *Play-by-Play: Radio, Television, and Big-Time College Sport* as he documents higher

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education’s acceptance of marketplace ideals in college sports and the subsequent commercialization and financial dilemmas that have emerged from the increasingly complex and troubled relationship between universities and the television industry.\textsuperscript{67}

An analysis of intercollegiate athletics from the perspective of critical political economy is detailed by Nand Hart-Nibbrig and Clement Cottingham who coin the term “corporate athleticism” to describe the 20\textsuperscript{th} century organization of college sports into a corporate infrastructure in which student athletes are commodities in “a growing mass entertainment industry” that includes “many of the leading universities in the United States.”\textsuperscript{68} The authors use the metaphor of industrial capitalism to explore the development of intercollegiate athletics from the perspective of capital investment, workers (student athletes), coaches (management), product (wins) and profits (gate receipts).\textsuperscript{69} They maintain that the 1920s marked the point of no return for commercialized athletics as stadiums expanded to accommodate the crowds that came to see the full spectacle of football, marching bands, and cheerleaders. Although they mostly hold the media responsible for the transformation of college football from scholastic to corporate athleticism they sidestep the foundational role of radio and confine their critique to television.

The rise of the land-grant university and the subsequent relationship of football to higher education apparently have never been fully explored in a book-length study. However, those topics are partially covered in several books that were useful in this project. Rudolph’s \textit{American College and University: A History} provides both the historical context in which the land-grant institution developed and a chapter on the emergence of college football as an extracurricular activity.\textsuperscript{70} He also touched on these themes in a later work, \textit{Curriculum: A History of the

\textsuperscript{67} Ronald A. Smith, \textit{Play by Play: Radio, Television and Big-Time College Sport} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., p.7.
American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636, that situates the land-grant university within the context of an emerging industrial economy. Gems’ *Pride Profit & Patriarchy: Football and the Incorporation of American Cultural Values* ties the growth of college football to cultural and ideological tensions in the 19th and early 20th century. He argued that football played a role in the spread of American democracy by inviting the participation—either as players or spectators—of marginalized groups including workers, the rural population, and the American South as it struggled to come to grips with its defeat in the Civil War. Other important studies of football and American culture that inform this study are Donald J. Mrozek’s *Sport and American Mentality, 1880-1910*, and Donald Chu’s *The Character of American Higher Education and Intercollegiate Sport*. A generally overlooked, but thoughtful and incisive study of college football in the Depression era is Bradley Ellis Austin’s doctoral thesis, *A Competitive Business: The Ideologies, Cultures, and Practice of Men's and Women's College Sports During the Depression*. In his case studies of five universities, he connects the ideological justification for big-time football to the radically changing social and economic context of the 1930s. He concludes that the institution of intercollegiate athletics reinforced the prevailing middle class culture, helping to sustain democratic capitalism through its worst crisis. Warren Susman’s *Culture as History*, is perhaps the definitive cultural history of the Depression Era. Among the aspects of his work most pertinent to this project are his examinations of the development of consumer culture in the 1920s and 1930s and the rise of celebrity sports heroes and their impacts on spectators. He explores these topics as they relate to the process of cultural transformation that

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75 Bradley Ellis Austin, "A Competitive Business: The Ideologies, Cultures, and Practice of Men's and Women's College Sports During the Depression" (Ohio State, 2001).
occurs as a society adapts itself to new living and working conditions that result from technological innovation. Following Susman, this study found that the master narrative of the “American Way” was employed by both radio industry officials and at least one major conference director to justify the ongoing expansion and profit-making potential of radio and football. Susman provides context to the narrative, arguing that the 1930s was a time of “determined struggle for the attainment of the identity of an American Way of Life.” Benedict Anderson explores the linkage of patriotism to state goals in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism.* Anderson employed the term “Imagined Community” to refer to the sense of camaraderie and shared interests that bound together people who would never actually know one another. Although Anderson was writing about the rise of nationalism, this study follows Austin in applying the concept to the passions that unite followers of a particular sports team. In a somewhat similar fashion in *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952,* Michele Hilmes departs from the study of radio as a technology to examine its role in shaping American cultural consciousness.

Mark Dyreson explored the use of athletics by social reformers in the 19th and early 20th century as a tool to forge an inclusive and liberal society. “The self-styled Progressives conceived of modern sport as a social ‘technology,’ designed to adapt people to the new human environment,” he said. Dyreson used the term “sporting republic” to describe the use of sports to ease the transition to corporate capitalism in the early 20th century. In Dyreson’s critique, sport “offered a way to preserve competition and channel individual talent into socially efficient action.

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78 Bradley Ellis Austin, “A Competitive Business: The Ideologies, Cultures, and Practice of Men's and Women's College Sports During the Depression” (Ohio State, 2001).
A society organized around industrial and corporate enterprise required the welding of individual striving to group effort.81 However, Dyreson also chronicled a shift in the Progressive ideology in the 1920s. In the consumer culture that took the nation by storm, sport increasingly became mere entertainment, unconnected to the national political culture the reformists had hoped it would create and perpetuate.82

The philosophical underpinnings of critical political economy in this project draw broadly upon the work of two pioneers in the field, Golding and Murdock83 as well as Vincent Mosco, and the historical scholarship of Robert McChesney.84 Regarding the regulatory debates of the 1920s and 1930s that resulted in a commercial basis for electronic media in the United States, no work was more valuable to this project than McChesney’s history of that era, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935*.85 Using government reports, legislative records, and the correspondence and public comments of both commercial and non-profit broadcasters, McChesney provided a new interpretation of the early debates on the U.S. media system—one that acknowledged the existence of a vigorous reform movement that was opposed to a strictly commercial media and that offered an alternative. In addition, his work focused on the years after the creation of the FRC and through the consolidation of the radio industry under the FCC. This was a period previously overlooked by most scholars who tended to argue that the debate over media systems

ended in 1927 when Congress established the FRC. As McChesney found, it was in the 1928-1935 period that the opponents of commercial broadcasting marshaled their resources and forced a public debate on the issue. He also argued that their efforts, while not successful, were not entirely futile because they formed the basis for educational broadcasters’ later foray into FM radio and television, and because they offered an early glimpse into the incipient power of the modern broadcast industry. His revisionist history, in which he challenges the acceptance of capitalism as the rightful and only practicable foundation of modern American society, places his work squarely in the realm of critical political economy.

McChesney’s work has spawned many narrower studies of American broadcast history such as Godfried’s *WCFL: Chicago’s Voice of Labor, 1926-1978*. Godfried documents the efforts of Edward Noeckels to win a place on the broadcast band for labor, a cause that brought him into partnership with the educators who were similarly seeking reserved channels.86 This era is also covered in Gibson’s *Public Broadcasting: The Role of the Federal Government, 1912-1976*.87 Gibson shows how the early efforts of broadcast reformers to include a public option failed in the case of radio yet, provided the foundation on which a more successful battle for television would be waged. Another important work on the rise and decline of educational radio in the 1920s and early 1930s is Frost’s *Education’s Own Stations*.88 Commissioned by the U.S. Office of Education to document the status of radio on college campuses in the 1930s, Frost wrote his report based on accounts provided by the colleges and universities themselves. His compilation of individual histories has served to preserve some of the earliest experiences of educational radio with commercial and regulatory challenges. More recently, in *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920-1940*, Douglas B. Craig examines the role of radio in

the political culture of the United States between the two world wars. Although his examination of the regulatory debates covers much of the same ground as McChesney, Craig also explores the rhetoric of the radio debates, particularly the networks’ self-portrayals as social unifiers who by endowing “radio citizenship” on listeners could transcend ethnic, racial, regional, and cultural differences at a time of great social anxiety.89

The broader context into which this study is set is provided by Erik Barnouw’s *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States*. Of the three volumes in this sweeping account of the rise of electronic media, the most useful to this study were the first and second which examined the periods up to 193390 and from 1933-195391 respectively. These volumes comprise one of the earliest scholarly works to challenge the dominant view that commercial broadcasting was a natural outgrowth of democratic capitalism. Barnouw was the first to note the favoritism shown by the FRC and the FCC to the radio networks at the expense of educational, civic, religious, and independent broadcasters. Although he did not explore the issue in detail, his work suggested the possibilities for scholarship that were later seized by McChesney and others.

The other comprehensive history used as a reference in this work is *Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting* by Sterling and Kittross.92 This volume covers much of the same ground as Barnouw, but brings a more recent perspective.

This study draws most heavily upon the resources of four archives, identified here as PSULSC (Penn State University Libraries Special Collections), TOSUA (the Ohio State University Archives), Steenbock Library (University of Wisconsin), and WSHS (the Wisconsin State Historical Society). Additionally, extensive use was made of the *Annual Reports of the*

Federal Radio Commission, the Congressional Record, the proceedings of the four National Radio Conferences, publications of radio reformers such as Education on the Air, publications of the radio industry and early radio enthusiasts, notably, Broadcast Advertising (which became Broadcasting in 1933) and Wireless Age, and daily newspapers, particularly the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune.

Scope of Project

This project consists of several interconnected narratives concerning land-grant institutions, big-time college athletics, and the roles of radio and sports in higher education. These themes are examined against the backdrop of the United States in the first half of the 20th century, but primarily from 1927—when the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) was formed in a stopgap effort to regulate radio—through 1939, when most efforts to change the course of radio development had ended and commercial radio had consolidated its hold on college football.

Land-grant Institutions

Land-grant institutions with their own licensed stations are particularly well-suited sites for the consideration of commercial versus non-commercial sports broadcasting. They were founded on the principle that higher education should be available to all citizens and that the results of research should be widely disseminated. This explicit public purpose set them apart from sectarian colleges founded on theological principles or private schools established with philanthropic endowments. Although their presidents and governing boards were comprised almost exclusively of what sociologist C.S. Mills termed the “power elite,” the land-grants were unique in their embrace of the notion that higher education should be accessible to all regardless
of wealth or social status. To a great extent, the land-grant universities—especially in the Midwest—applied that same principle to radio. They conceived of it as a nonprofit enterprise, and they argued that the airwaves were public resources akin to waterways.

Radio

On the campuses of many land-grant universities, home to some of the most prominent intercollegiate sports programs in the nation, radio followed closely on the heels of the phenomenon of spectator sports. Campus radio stations provided an early megaphone for the exploits of the football team, helping to attract students and build reputations for rural colleges that aspired to be as well-known as Harvard and Yale. When voice transmission became common in the post-World War I years, land-grant institutions were among the first to upgrade their experimental stations to full-fledged licensees. In the 1920s, dozens of land-grant stations were operating—from WRUF at the University of Florida in Gainsville to KOAC at the Oregon State University in Corvallis. They filled their airwaves with everything their institutions had to offer—advice to farmers and homemakers, lectures, musical program, and most pertinent to this study, college athletics.

Commercial radio also embraced college athletics. Initially, they carried collegiate games on a sustaining basis. That meant that the broadcasts were not advertising-supported, and no money changed hands between the college and the station. Rather, the broadcasts provided relatively inexpensive content for commercial broadcasters and free institutional publicity for universities. Sustaining programs, which touched on everything from religion to venereal disease, were not thought to be commercially viable, either because of the sensitive nature of the material

or because they appealed to a limited audience. However, once college football had demonstrated its mass appeal to radio audiences, game broadcasts moved into the lucrative category of “sponsored” programming—presentations paid for by businesses in exchange for advertising.

In the early years of sponsored programming, colleges themselves did not benefit financially. Many were content to offer their games in exchange for the free publicity. But as the advertising revenue increased, colleges began collecting a share of the largesse by charging radio stations for the privilege of broadcasting their games. The financial stakes were raised when schools began to sell exclusive broadcast rights to a single sponsor. In most cases, as the proceeds from broadcasting were spread around campus, opposition to advertising became muted. Wisconsin, as one exception to the rule, took enormous pride in the non-profit nature of its athletic broadcasting. As a 1936 report noted, Wisconsin radio listeners “have never been surfeited with advertising or objectionable commercial features, for this station has never sold a minute’s worth of time.”

Commercialization of college sports was not a new development in the 1930s. As Smith has noted, the first intercollegiate athletic event—a crew meet between Harvard and Yale in 1852—was underwritten by a railroad company seeking to boost train travel to a remote lakeside resort in New Hampshire. Media coverage of college sports likewise dates to the earliest intercollegiate competitions. Newspaper coverage of the elite eastern universities’ annual Thanksgiving Day football game in New York City helped to establish the tradition of a holiday match between rival schools which in turn sparked the dramatic rise of spectator sports.

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95 The FCC’s 1946 “Blue Book,” or Public Service Responsibility of Broadcast Licensees, described five niches filled by sustaining programs: 1) cultural productions with limited popular appeal, 2) controversial or sensitive material likely to be avoided by advertisers, 3) minority programming, 4) civic or non-profit presentations, and 5) experimental programs.

96 “No Time for Sale,” August 1936. Harold B. Engel Papers, Box 14, M87-133, WSHS.

Publicized in both the sports and society pages, the game was drawing upward of 10,000 fans by the 1880s in what Smith described as a combination of the “educationally elite colleges on the athletic field with the social elite in the stands.”\(^{98}\) The media attention and the growing revenue from gate receipts triggered the spread of Thanksgiving Day games throughout the nation by the turn of the 20\(^{th}\) century and underscored the commercial potential of college football.

Although the process of commercialization was well underway by the 1930s, the alliance of college sports with commercial radio nonetheless marked a profound ideological shift. Far from merely welcoming newspaper coverage of events, colleges and universities began to put a price on the broadcast rights to game coverage, a tacit acknowledgement that big-time sports were commodities with an exchange value in the marketplace. Implicit in this thinking was the differentiation of athletics from the rest of academia. Whereas other forms of campus entertainment such as drama and music remained part of the public service mission of the land-grant institution, football’s function was to generate revenue and serve as a marketing tool to build the college “brand.” Ironically, this philosophical shift occurred within the same decade that administrators were addressing the Carnegie Report’s allegations of professionalization and commercialization of football and proclaiming their intent to preserve the sport’s amateur status and educational purpose.

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\(^{98}\) Smith, "Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.79. As Smith recounts, the Intercollegiate Football Association that started the Thanksgiving tradition was a student-led league comprised of teams from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, and later, Wesleyan. The annual Thanksgiving Day game was a championship match between the two top-ranked teams from the previous season. First played in 1876 in Hoboken, New Jersey, the game moved to the Polo Grounds in New York City in the early 1880s. In the nation’s commercial center, the holiday classic quickly became a prominent social event and a major source of revenue for the teams that shared the gate receipts.
Intercollegiate Athletics

The university-licensed stations that had aired college football in the 1920s had almost no problem justifying the sport’s place either on campus or in the broadcast schedules of their radio stations. Various strands of 19th century social thought had woven a solid foundation for athletics in public education by asserting the importance of a well-regulated body to a disciplined mind. Pragmatists such as Dewey argued for the inseparability of thought and action.99 Turn-of-the-century progressives, notably Theodore Roosevelt, went a step further, maintaining that physical action shaped a person’s moral and ethical character.100 By the 1920s, many campus administrators had responded to critics of college football’s excesses by taking control of sports from students and alumni and incorporating them into academic departments of physical education overseen by faculty and deans. Funding of intercollegiate athletics, however, often remained in the hands of athletic boards or associations, composed of both university staff and alumni. That the gate receipts from football were generally used to fund non-revenue generating intercollegiate sports was frequently cited as a justification for the continued growth and trend toward commercialization of the game.

Some of the land-grant universities of the Midwest had anticipated the need for reform in intercollegiate athletics as early as 1895 with the creation of the Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives or Western Conference.101 Later known as the Big Ten, the conference

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100 Elting E. Morison, ed. *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,1952). Although there are many excellent studies of Roosevelt’s role in promoting a sporting culture, his ideal of the “strenuous life” is perhaps best expressed in his own writings.
101 The Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives, also known as the Western Conference, and later as the Big Ten, was initially composed of the Universities of Chicago, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Northwestern, Purdue, and Wisconsin. Indiana University and Iowa joined in 1899. Ohio State was admitted in 1912. In 1946, Chicago withdrew, its president having persuaded the University’s trustees to abolish football. Michigan State College (now Michigan State University) joined the conference in 1949. In 1990, the Pennsylvania State University became the 11th member of the Big Ten.
predated even the NCAA. Established by the presidents of seven Midwest universities, the organization aimed to address some of the emerging problems in intercollegiate competition, particularly violence and the participation of professional athletes in the universities’ regular sporting events. As the self-professed “anchor of amateur athletics in America,” the Big Ten set many of the eligibility standards and athlete supervision requirements that were subsequently adopted by other conferences. \(^{102}\) It was also the first conference to hire a professional staff, headed by Griffith, with the power to investigate institutional wrong-doing and to enforce its findings. It is important to this project because it was a guiding force for both Wisconsin and Ohio State, and because it provides a site for studying the intersection of broadcast media and football in an historical context dating back to the 1920s.

The inclusion of Penn State in this study adds both regional diversity and the perspective of an independent school that took a somewhat different approach to athletics and media policy perhaps, by virtue of its non-aligned status. Each of the three schools examined here were land-grant institutions that were among the first both to hold radio licenses and to emerge as football powerhouses that challenged the traditional dominance of the Ivy League and other elite universities. A final reason for selecting these universities is that each of them has significant archival collections that inform the bulk of this paper, and they provide free and ready access to their holdings—the \textit{sine qua non} for an undertaking such as this.

\textbf{Organization of Chapters}

The background section of this paper provides the national historical context for the three case studies. Chapter Two is a broad overview of the development of both intercollegiate sports

\footnote{Benjamin G. Rader, \textit{American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports} (New York: Prentice Hall, 1999), p.188.}
and educational radio within the context of the land-grant institution. Although a chronological thread runs through this chapter, it is also organized thematically in order to underscore the impact of various policies and events upon the institutions examined in the case studies. This chapter reviews the establishment of the FRC in 1927 and the FCC in 1934 and briefly touches upon the two separate policy approaches represented by the NCER and the NACRE. So as not to simply reiterate the findings of McChesney, this study examines the federal debate over control of broadcasting as it played out on the campuses of land-grant universities and within intercollegiate organizations such as the Big Ten Conference and the NCAA. In some cases, the radio debates overlapped with intense deliberations on intercollegiate athletics prompted by the 1929 Carnegie Report. Higher education was grappling with the central conundrum of big-time football: it commanded extraordinary influence, resources, and attention that were far out of proportion to its place in the core mission of the university. In the wake of the 1929 report, many academic administrators pledged to de-escalate their football programs by addressing the issues that were driving the professionalization of the game such as athletic subsidies. In this era, perhaps more than at any other time, the case for keeping college football on college radio stations would have seemed to have found support.

For the most part, commercial broadcasters insisted that they could be entrusted to provide not just football, but any educational programming. They argued that rather than universities taking the time, trouble, and expense to maintain their own channels, commercial stations would supply airtime for educational content. The notion of cooperation between educators and commercial operators appealed to legislators who were convinced that radio could be an effective vehicle for education yet remained committed to the principles of marketplace competition. Although this commercial/non-commercial partnership did yield some highly regarded radio programs, it eventually faded out of existence as willing advertisers flocked to
In the end, the partnership allowed commercial radio to cherry pick education’s most popular content—athletics—and abandon programming with true educational value. It also reinforced the ideological argument that non-commercial broadcasting was unnecessary by purporting to demonstrate that the marketplace could deliver whatever educational programming the people wanted.  

Chapters Three through Five focus on the development of football and radio broadcasting through the narrower lens of individual institutions. These case studies draw upon the materials in each school’s archives and in the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Archival materials used in this dissertation include correspondence between university personnel and national organizations, internal communication among faculty, staff, and administrators, minutes of administrative and governing board meetings, and articles from local and student newspapers to get a sense of how these issues were presented and perceived by those who were directly affected by events and policies.

Each of the land-grant institutions in this study offers unique insights into public broadcasting history. Ohio State is notable for its early and zealous commitment to public media and athletic broadcasting. The call letters of the university’s first fully-licensed radio station, WEAO, were said to stand for “willing, energetic, athletic Ohio” in keeping with the station’s commitment to sports news including play-by-play of Buckeye football games. As early as 1925, just one year after beginning regular broadcasts, radio operations were separated from the Electrical Engineering department and consolidated into the Broadcasting Station Department.

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103 Some of the most highly regarded products of the Cooperation Doctrine came out of the University of Chicago where a radio committee, headed by Allen Miller, produced popular programs such as “The Chicago Round Table.” This current affairs program initially aired on commercial station WMAQ and was later picked up by NBC for national broadcast. See Minutes of Meeting of the Radio Committee, 10 March 1931. Allen Miller Papers, Radio at the University, WSHS.


Faculty buy-in, a full time staff, and annual listener surveys put radio on a solid footing at Ohio State, enabling it to weather the Depression and become a leader in the battle for reserved channels for public television. This case study of Ohio State also affords the opportunity to examine the bureaucratic hurdles that the commercially-oriented FRC placed in the path of educational broadcasters, such as assigning undesirable hours and requiring expensive legal counsel to represent the school at hearings in Washington, D.C. Although its legal battle with the FRC was only partially successful, Ohio State’s spirited defense of public radio helped to shape the arguments that would convince legislators of the need for educational channels a decade later. In addition, Ohio State provided a model whereby a portion of the proceeds from the gate receipts of athletic events was invested in the university radio station to insure that football fans had a commercial-free option for enjoying Buckeye football.\(^{106}\) Also, to a far greater extent than in either of the other case studies, the debate over commercialization of football was preserved at Ohio State in the extensive records kept by J.L. Morrill, the junior dean of the College and Education and later, the vice president of Ohio State. Morrill also served as a member of the Athletic Board and the chair of the radio committee within that board.\(^{107}\) The memoranda, meeting minutes, and personal correspondence in his files are a testament to the doubts and fears that university administrators addressed in their efforts to promote football while preserving the decorum befitting prominent institutions of higher learning. In addition, Ohio State’s athletic director Lynn W. St. John preserved in his papers many of the writings of Big Ten Commissioner

\(^{106}\) In radio’s first decade, opposition to advertising was widespread. Not only was the advertiser thought to influence the content, but the hawking of one’s wares on the airwaves was considered to be intrusive, offensive, and detrimental to the development of radio programming. Craig noted that even Lee de Forest, who considered himself to be the “father of radio,” considered advertising in the ether to be “nauseating and vulgar” and “nothing less than an act of vandalism.” See: Douglas B. Craig, *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p.10.

\(^{107}\) Morrill left Ohio State in 1942 to become President of the University of Wyoming. From 1945-1960, Morrill was President of the University of Minnesota where he continued to take an active role in shaping athletic policies.
John L. Griffith, as well as his own personal correspondence with Griffith.\textsuperscript{108} Perhaps more than any other body of documents, this correspondence captures the tension of the times as the essentially conservative Griffith promoted athletics as the reenactment of the values that buoyed a political and economic system under assault by social forces that threatened the status quo. Roosevelt’s 1932 election and subsequent re-elections were interpreted by Griffith as the public’s loss of faith in capitalism. “[The public is] demanding that the government in a large sense direct the future lives and affairs of the people….it means that we are abandoning the old idea that the government is the servant of the people and are asking it to become the master,” he wrote to the Big Ten athletic directors. He feared that criticism of intercollegiate football might translate into “a demand that the government likewise exercise control over the nation’s athletics.”\textsuperscript{109} Griffith believed that the policies emanating from the White House reflected an effete, dying European civilization. The extent to which he viewed football as a skirmish in a larger battle to save the country was captured in his memoranda to the Big Ten athletic directors and in confidential letters to St. John. For example, in exploring the possibility of an annual Rose Bowl Tournament with the Pacific Coast Conference, he invoked the imagery of the American Frontier:

\begin{quote}

The middle west and the west will ultimately establish a new American type. We cannot longer look to the east or the south for our political or economic salvation. The producing sections must take the lead and in the years to come direct the thought of the nation. As the west and the middle west become more closely knit economically and politically, our athletic relationship more and more should be with our friends on the west coast.\textsuperscript{110}
\end{quote}

Griffith, however, did not confine his opinions to confidential letters or even to inter-conference communication. He also spoke out in public venues on what he perceived to be Roosevelt’s

\textsuperscript{108} St. John’s friendship with Griffith dates at least to 1922 when St. John and Michigan’s Fielding Yost headed the search committee that hired Griffith from the University of Illinois’ athletic department to become the first full-time commissioner of the Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives.

\textsuperscript{109} John Griffith to the Directors of Athletics of the Conference, 26 July 1938. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10, Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner: Correspondence (Griffith and St. John), April 1937-December 1939, TOSUA.

\textsuperscript{110} John Griffith to L.W. St. John, 27 June 1938. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10, Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner: Correspondence (Griffith and St. John), April 1937-December 1939, TOSUA.
dangerous tilt toward socialism, and he appeared to be frustrated that his words might be falling on deaf ears. In the wake of Roosevelt’s first re-election in 1936, Griffith wrote to St. John:

Well, Saint, we took an awful licking yesterday, didn’t we? I was reconciled to a Roosevelt victory but I never dreamed it would be a landslide. Apparently America wittingly or unwittingly sold her vote. Well if things don’t work out well the next four years they can’t blame you and me because we did what we could to bring about a change.111

Little direct evidence can be found of what St. John might have done to unseat Roosevelt, but Griffith clearly used his position in the athletic world to portray the president as the enemy of competitive endeavors such as college sports.

The University of Wisconsin offers an example of an alternative, government-supported broadcast system. Radio at Wisconsin developed with the strong support of the state. Recognizing the value of the University radio station to the citizenry, the state Department of Agriculture and Markets used it for informational broadcasts as early as 1921. Other state agencies followed suit, and the station flourished under Republican, Democratic, and Progressive administrations. In fact, the success of Wisconsin’s WHA encouraged the state government to develop a two-station network to serve the entire state. One of the system’s stated objectives as enunciated by the University president was “to serve public interest and public enterprise by providing them with as good radio facilities as the commercial stations have placed at the disposal of private interests and private enterprise.”112 That athletics fell within that mandate seems clear. The second station in the network, WLBL in Steven’s Point, carried even professional football, bringing Green Bay Packers’ games to listeners at a time when professional football was scorned as a crass distortion of the amateur game. The survival of WHA and its long-running association with Badger football

111 John L. Griffith to L. W. St. John, 4 November 1936. Director of Athletics, 9/e-1/10, Correspondence (Griffith and St. John), May 1936 - March, 1937, TOSUA.
112 Administration and Financing of Radio Station WHA, 1939. Harold Engel Papers, Box 14, M87-133, WSHS.
demonstrated that an educational, non-profit model with state support was a viable alternative to commercial radio.

Penn State is included in this study for exactly the opposite reason. Although radio was adopted early, its support among faculty and administrators was more tepid than at Ohio State. Compared to Wisconsin, its ties to state government were quite limited. That may be attributed in part to its distance from the state capital in Harrisburg, nearly 100 miles away and accessible in the 1920s and 1930s only by narrow mountain roads or by railroad. The college’s Board of Trustees routinely allocated only enough funding to maintain the transmitter and other equipment, so programming the station was an ongoing struggle waged by a few dedicated individuals. Nonetheless, football was one of the few staples of the broadcast schedule. In 1926, underground lines were installed to connect the football field to a radio transmitter, allowing for regular live broadcasts of Saturday home games. In the Depression years, however, administrators could not justify even the paltry sums meted out to radio. When added to the increasing bureaucratic demands of the FRC, radio became an extravagance that the college could not afford. In 1932, Penn State abandoned its experiment with electronic media, and six years later, sold its broadcast rights for football games to an oil company. The outcome of Penn State’s first brush with radio is typical of the experience of dozens of other schools.

Chapter Six is a synthesis of the findings of this study which concludes that the current problems afflicting modern collegiate athletics have their ideological roots at least partly planted in the commercialization of radio in the 1930s. This chapter summarizes the actions taken and decisions made by college and university representatives, and it suggests that the controversy over commercialization of athletic broadcasts was one struggle in a larger ideological battle to define the roles of government, industry, and education at a pivotal time in American history.

Full disclosure compels me to note two points that are relevant to the approach I take in this dissertation. First, my personal opinions on broadcasting align with the educational
broadcasters and other reformers that I discuss in this study. I believe that American democracy would have been better served if a portion of the airwaves had been reserved at the dawn of the broadcast era for radio operations that were motivated by something other than selling products and amassing profits. Nonetheless, I also believe that the media’s financial dependency on the state, private donors, or the public raises other sets of issues that were not fully addressed by Ohio State or Wisconsin.113 Still, the marketplace model that the radio industry insisted would offer choices to listeners in fact deprived the public of diversity in broadcasting by limiting the choices to programs with mass advertising appeal to the exclusion of most alternative programming. In addition, the early promise of radio as a forum for public debate, amply demonstrated by WHA in Wisconsin, was largely dashed by commercial radio which sought to avoid political discussion entirely rather than deal with the equal time requirements under the Fairness Doctrine. Second, I am a devoted follower of both public media and intercollegiate sports. I worked for 24 years at Penn State Public Broadcasting. I received my Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from Penn State. I hold season tickets to Penn State football and basketball games, and I am married to a former Penn State linebacker, Gary Gray, a product of Joe Paterno’s “Grand Experiment” in strengthening the bond between athletics and academics. Five of my six children have graduated from or attend Penn State, and two of my sons have played Big Ten soccer for the Nittany Lions where they received the benefits that accrue to non-revenue sports via a commercially successful football program. For more than three decades I have made my home in “Happy Valley,” and Penn State has been very good to me.

113 To cite one example of the problems that can arise when public media are not sufficiently buffered from their funding sources, in 1935, Ohio Governor Martin L. Davey asked the director of Ohio State’s School of the Air to broadcast messages to the schools supporting his re-election campaign. The director refused, noting that “legislators and the public must be convinced that education on the air is non-partisan and that all may benefit regardless of party affiliations.” The director was subsequently fired and the governor refused to support the School of the Air in his next budget. See: B.H. Darrow, Radio Trailblazing (Columbus, College Book Company, 1940), pp. 125-126.
Chapter 2

College Football on the Air

Radio will bring with it a revival that will end one knows not where. It has already created a stir. People who never before took an interest in sports have found them to be exhilarating...Many of them never knew what they had been missing until the voice in the loud-speaker brought to them a mind picture of a great contest, brought to them the living voices and actions of the players as well as the spectators.114

Broadcasting: Its New Day
1925

When the land-grant system was adopted in 1862, the first intercollegiate football game between Rutgers and Princeton was still seven years in the future, and Guglielmo Marconi had not been born. But both football and radio would be shaped by the distinctly American institution created by the federal Morrill Act, and both would in turn help to mold the public perception of land-grants. The progressive philosophy at the core of the land-grant institution would be embraced by educational broadcasters in their early skirmishes with corporate radio for a stake in the electromagnetic spectrum.115 Where the commercial industry saw a vehicle for mass entertainment, the land-grant institutions saw a tool for mass education—the technological descendant of correspondence courses and extension agents.116

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115 Although the progressives resist classification by a single definition, the different strands of progressive thought held at least one belief in common—that the world could be made better and its ills wiped out through political reform, social justice, or community volunteers committed to positive change. For an excellent anthology by leading historians of the Progressive Era, see: Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, ed. Who Were the Progressives? (New York: Palgrave, 2002).
Land-grant institutions were also distinct from many private universities in their approach to radio. Levering Tyson, Columbia University’s head of extension who later became a major figure in the battle for educational radio, favored a commercial model for educators in the early 1930s. Having turned a profit by charging a fee to the thousands of students enrolled in Columbia’s home-study courses, Tyson believed radio represented a vast untapped commercial opportunity.\footnote{Levering Tyson, "Columbia's Ten Years Experience in Home Study" (National University Extension Association, Washington, DC, May 7-9, 1930), pp. 51-56.} He insisted that the best route to educational radio was in partnership with commercial networks that would add an element of showmanship to the often dreary instructional lectures on campus radio.\footnote{Eugene Leach, “Tuning out Education: The Cooperation Doctrine in Radio, 1922-38,” \textit{Current.org} (1999), http://www.current.org/coop/coop1.shtml.} His plan, however, stood in stark contrast to the land-grant institutions’ which provided free extension services as part of their educational and social mandate.

\textbf{The Land-Grant Colleges}

The principles at the heart of the three major land-grant laws were that every citizen should have access to higher education, that research produced at the land-grants should be widely accessible, and that courses of study should include practical topics that had relevance to farmers, miners, shopkeepers, and other members of the growing middle class.\footnote{Coy F. II Cross, \textit{Justin Smith Morrill: Father of the Land-Grant Colleges} (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999). The three major Land-Grant laws are: the 1862 Land-Grant College Act (or Morrill Act), which provided a means to fund institutions of higher learning; the 1887 Hatch Act which created state experiment stations to aid and promote agriculture and rural life; and the 1914 Smith-Lever Act which resulted in the development of Cooperative Extension as a means of disseminating research results to farms, households, businesses, and governments.} This marked both a practical and philosophical shift in the American approach to higher education. Practically speaking, land-grants were a response to the mid-19th century rise of an industrialized and urbanized society marked by new technology, a rapidly growing population, and an incipient...
consumer culture. Trained professionals were needed in engineering, public health, agriculture, mining, forestry, communications, and the burgeoning service industries to keep pace with the nation’s economic and demographic expansion. But the Land-Grant Act was also rooted in the democratic ideal of equal opportunity for all.\footnote{Frederick Rudolph, \textit{Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study since 1636} (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1978).} The Industrial Revolution had created both unprecedented wealth and an underprivileged working population of urban and rural poor. Without access to the skills necessary to compete in the new social order, it was thought that the lower and middle classes might sink into a permanently disadvantaged caste incapable of pursuing the opportunities for upward mobility available to earlier generations of Americans. Historian Allan Nevins maintained that the cause of democracy was the driving force behind the land-grant movement. Liberty and equality, he wrote, could not survive unless everyone had “full opportunity to pursue all occupations at the highest practicable level” regardless of class, wealth, gender, or geography.\footnote{Allan Nevins, \textit{The Origins of the Land-Grant Colleges and State Universities: A Brief Account of the Morrill Act of 1862 and Its Results} (Washington, DC: Civil War Centennial Commission, 1962), pp.16-17.}

Each state had wide latitude in deciding how to interpret the land-grant directive. Wisconsin lawmakers turned over their endowment to the state university that had been created previously by constitutional mandate in 1848.\footnote{Wisconsin Constitution, Article 10, Section 6, http://www.Legis.State.Wi.Us/Statutes/Wisconst.Pdf.} The Pennsylvania legislature chose an existing agricultural school which subsequently beat back the claims of other institutions to the Morrill Act funding to become the state’s sole land-grant college.\footnote{Michael Bezilla, \textit{Penn State: An Illustrated History} (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1985).} Ohio lawmakers rejected various proposals to divide the endowment among several existing colleges. Instead, they enacted a legislative statute that created a new institution—the Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical
College. The different approaches taken by state governments reflected the broad and flexible guidelines of the Morrill Act. As Rudolph noted, each state “ventured into essentially unchartered territory, making arrangements as seemed most appropriate to its own peculiar educational, social, and political environment.” The economic environment was also a consideration in molding the new land-grant colleges. To enhance the affordability of higher education for the working and middle classes they aimed to serve, most land-grant colleges initially charged little or no tuition for in-state students. Instead, they relied primarily on their Morrill endowments and state financial support which helped to attract students but left the schools struggling for financial survival. Evan Pugh, the president of Pennsylvania’s agricultural school calculated that a land-grant institution would need a yearly budget of $47,000, yet in their first few decades of existence none of the land-grant institutions except Cornell came close to matching that amount with their Morrill windfalls. By the 1880s, most land-grants were requesting additional appropriations from the state governments along with the annual proceeds from the Morrill endowment.

By the turn of the 20th century, land-grants also were turning to the philanthropy of corporate leaders. In both Ohio and Pennsylvania, two of the nation’s most industrialized states, leaders of business and industry sat on the governing boards of the land-grant colleges and exerted considerable influence on the physical development of the campuses. It was no coincidence that college presidents who assiduously courted business leaders and legislators also oversaw major building campaigns. Industry-friendly governing boards also influenced the

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127 For example, in the administration of Penn State President George Atherton (1882-1906) construction of a library and an auditorium were financed by Andrew Carnegie and Charles Schwab respectively. Both buildings were admired as architectural gems. A century later, Carnegie Building housed the University’s College of Communications and Schwab Auditorium continued to provide a venue for lectures and arts performances.
curriculum by promoting a utilitarian view of education. According to Nevins, for example, steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, who was a trustee at Penn State, downplayed the significance of theoretical learning in favor of practical education that would specifically serve the growing business class. In the early 20th century, however, even among those who accepted the utilitarian function of higher education, some had grown wary of the influence of industry. A small but articulate and thoughtful minority blamed the intrusion of big business into higher education for what they perceived to be a “dumbing down” of the curriculum and a loss of academic independence.

One of the most vocal critics was Thorstein Veblen, an economist who had been a faculty member at several prominent universities including Chicago and Stanford. In his book *The Higher Learning in America*, Veblen charged that the leaders of business and industry, who comprised a significant portion of collegiate governing boards, had remodeled the internal structure of colleges and universities to resemble their own corporate bodies. One way they accomplished this, according to Veblen, was by choosing presidents not for their intellectual heft but for their bureaucratic management expertise and their will to compete—for students, funding, and prestige. Although he did not suggest an alternative to a business-oriented approach, Veblen attempted to demonstrate the consequences of a corporate model. He accused both college presidents and trustees of lusting after power and glory which he saw reflected in the conspicuously elegant buildings on campus. He charged that true learning had been replaced by a system of credit accumulation and statistical accounting of grades and that academic freedom had been stifled by business concerns. In one pointed jab that struck at the very heart of the land-grant college, Veblen suggested that industry had commandeered the curriculum. “Any extension of the

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128 See S. Nearing, "Who's Who among College Trustees," *School and Society* Vol. 6 (1917). According to Nearing’s analysis, 80% of the governing boards of all post-secondary schools were comprised of merchants, manufacturers, capitalists, corporate officials, bankers, doctors, lawyers, and religious leaders.
corporation’s activity can be more readily effected, is accepted more as an expedient matter of course, if it promises to have such a ‘practical’ value, he wrote. “‘Practical’ in this connection means useful for private gain; it need imply nothing in the way of serviceability to the common good.”

Veblen saw the hand of industry even in extracurricular activities such as football. He dismissed collegiate athletics as a marketing ploy to entice students who were not sufficiently motivated by scholarship. Such students detracted from the institution’s educational mission, he said, but gave “a certain highly appreciated, loud tone (‘college spirit’) to the student body; and so it is felt to benefit the corporation of learning by drawing public attention. Corporate means expended in provision for these academic...‘side-shows’...are commonly felt to be well spent.”

Even those who disagreed with Veblen’s conclusions could not deny that corporate America had insinuated itself into higher education by the turn of the century. As Veysey noted in his history of the American university the intrusion of big business was regarded as either a cause for alarm or a necessary condition of expansion depending on one’s perspective. Andrew Sloan Draper, president and regent of the University of Illinois, attempted to stake out a middle ground in the debate. He drew a clear distinction between the business-like operation of a university and its non-profit mission. In 1906, he wrote in the Atlantic Monthly that “the distinguishing ear-marks of an American university are its moral purpose, its scientific aim, its unselfish public service, its inspirations to all men in all noble things, and its incorruptibility by

130 Ibid., p.87.
131 It is interesting to note that one of those who agreed whole-heartedly with Veblen was Wisconsin’s President Glenn Frank. Writing in the campus newspaper in 1933, the president recommended that students read Veblen who Frank lauded as “a rebel economist who penetrated more nearly to the heart of the dilemmas that dog the footsteps of the Machine Age more than any American scholar.” See: Glenn Frank, "Technocracy: Its Origins and Meaning," Daily Cardinal, January 21, 1933, p.4.
commercialism,” adding that the modern university was nonetheless “a business concern as well as a moral and intellectual instrumentality, and if business methods are not applied to its management it will break down.”\textsuperscript{133}

By the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the proliferation of post-secondary schools and the limited state and philanthropic dollars reinforced the land-grant institutions’ adoption of business strategies as survival mechanisms. As they competed for students, they diversified their “product line” by broadening their curricular offerings. Intercollegiate athletics, which had already proved to be a significant revenue generator and public relations vehicle for elite universities, was perceived as an opportunity rather than a nuisance or distraction. Four decades after passage of the Morrill Act, schools such as Penn State and Ohio State were still trying to solidify their claims to be their states’ top priority in funding for higher education. The growing passion for football as a mass spectator sport could be exploited for reasons that had little to do with education. According to Chu:

\begin{quote}
The large land-grant schools saw a means of acquiring increased support from the legislature and the people. Representing the community, each school’s victory provided it with rights to boast to the people of its state. Through each victory, the often culturally diffuse and geographically disparate peoples of the region could be unified.\textsuperscript{134}
\end{quote}

Ironically, even as Illinois’ Draper was extolling the pure and incorruptible motives of higher education, he and six other university presidents, four of whom also headed land-grant institutions, were addressing the problems of college football—one of which was its corruption by commercialism and professionalism.\textsuperscript{135}

Rise of Intercollegiate Sports

The commercial potential of college football was not likely evident from the contest between Rutgers and Princeton in 1869, but it became apparent by the mid-1870s. The Intercollegiate Football Association was formed in 1876, and a Thanksgiving Day championship game was scheduled in the New York area. Historians of intercollegiate sports generally agree that athletics were initiated and advanced by students as an extracurricular activity before control was claimed variously by alumni, faculty, administrators, conferences, national organizations, and media. Scholars have advanced a variety of theories to explain the rise of intercollegiate sports on college campuses. Competitive athletics were seen as a method of transitioning from childhood to adulthood; as an adolescent response to the dull curriculum of the early 19th century; as a student assertion of independence; as a means of unifying a student population spread across the growing diversity of disciplines; as an antidote to the perception of college students as intellectual, bespectacled sissies, and as a response to “muscular Christianity,” the “Gymnasium Movement,” and other efforts that promoted the holistic development of physical strength along with mental and spiritual acuity. Others have suggested that between the Civil War and World War I, the lack of prolonged American involvement in military conflicts prompted the substitution of contact sports as a training ground for young American men. Football, with its emphasis on strategy, strength, and incursions into opponents’ territory, offered a surrogate battlefield for otherwise untested warriors. By the close of the 19th century, the United States had acquired territories as widespread as the Philippines, Cuba, and

Hawaii, and protecting these imperial possessions required the martial spirit embodied by intercollegiate football. At the dawn of the age of American imperialism, the football field served as a mock battleground—and not just for the athletes. In a 1901 history of Princeton sports, the authors asserted that intercollegiate athletics “… have a distinct educational value for spectators as well as for players….the temper of steady resolution and indomitable hope which enables men to endure to the end and to snatch victory from defeat—these are good things to contemplate and imitate.” 141 As Rader has noted, the connection between wartime patriotism and football was reinforced in the athletic construction boom of the 1920s when many colleges and universities such as Ohio State used the term “Memorial Stadium” in their field names in honor of the fallen heroes of the Great War.142

Although the elite eastern universities gave birth to football, it quickly spread throughout the nation. Many land-grant colleges were particularly inclined toward football because their rural and often remote locations left students with few options for amusement. Football also provided a bond between town and gown in rural areas and small towns. Rader argued that the bond often extended to the entire state, particularly in those states without significant claims to fame in the way of scenic wonders, national monuments or major historical sites.143 College football became a source of community pride. In farming regions, football provided the entrée of a small, isolated population into a larger “imagined community” created by a shared passion for the exploits of “dear old State.”144 This fan base was “imagined” because as Anderson used the terms in regards to nationalism, “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow

144 ———, American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports (New York: Prentice Hall, 1999). See Chapter 11 for a full discussion of the rise of college football from the late 19th century crises through the acceptance of many of the commercial aspects of the modern game in the mid-20th century.
members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”145

At both Ohio State and Penn State, football began as impromptu scrimmages in the 1880s. Finances and distances confined their intercollegiate competition to nearby schools—generally small liberal arts colleges. Unlike the eastern schools whose athletic exploits were fodder for national newspapers, the land-grant institutions initially attracted the notice only of their own school newspapers. Ohio State’s Lantern heralded the start of football by observing in 1887 that nearby Marietta College was “willing to play us a game of foot-ball on our own ground,” and asking, “What is to be done with the challenge?” 146 That same year, Penn State’s Free Lance reported that the “first eleven” outscored Bucknell University 54-0 “on the occasion of our visit to Lewisburg,” a small farming community in the adjacent valley.147

Wisconsin football began in the same decade. However, the sport had developed at a faster pace at the big Midwest schools, catching the notice of the mainstream press which in turn, fed a growing public appetite for football news. By 1890, the Badgers were playing a regular interstate schedule against Purdue, Minnesota, Iowa, and Chicago.148 In 1894, the University converted an old Civil War military center, Camp Randall, into a football field with seating for

146 ”Local Notes," The Fortnightly Lantern, Vol. 7, No. 6, April 21, 1887, p.6. According to Ridge Riley’s history of Penn State football, the publicity given to the 35th reunion of the 1887 team drew a spate of letters from peeved alumni who claimed to have played a football game in 1881—six years before the “official” start of Penn State football. Skeptical members of the 1887 squad argued that the earlier game was a mere pick-up match or that it had been played under the rules of English rugby rather than American football. While accounts in area newspapers confirmed that an intercollegiate match had been played between Penn State and Bucknell in 1881, the discovery of the rulebook used to referee the game, titled The Latest Rules of Lacrosse, cast doubts on the claim of the 1881 team members that they had played Penn State’s first football game. Penn State’s alumni secretary forged a compromise between the competing claimants by acknowledging the 1881 squad for playing the first intercollegiate contest. However, the 1887 squad was deemed the first official team for beginning a regular annual season of games played under American football rules. See Ridge Riley, Road to Number One: A Personal Chronicle of Penn State Football (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1977), pp. 11-15.
3,000—although as many as 15,000 additional spectators often ringed the playing field.\footnote{Dave Anderson, University of Wisconsin Football (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005).} But the rapid expansion of football brought to the Midwest the same problems that the elite eastern schools had been grappling with at least since 1882—eligibility, commercialization, professionalization, and violence.\footnote{At the turn of the century, the problems of intercollegiate athletics became grist for the muckrakers’ mills. See: Henry Beech Needham, "The College Athlete: How Commercialism Is Making Him a Professional," McClures Magazine, Vol. 25, No. 2, June, 1905, pp. 260-273. In this issue, Needham looked at violence and the focus on gate receipts. He continued his investigation in the next month’s edition with a look at recruiting and subsidization. See: ———, "The College Athlete: His Amateur Code, Its Evasion and Administration," McClures Magazine, Vol. 25, No. 3, July, 1905, pp. 4-17.}

In 1895, Purdue’s president invited his counterparts at six other universities to meet with him in Chicago. Dubbed the Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives (but soon to be known as the Western Conference and eventually, the Big Ten) the collegiate executives drew up a set of rules designed to minimize injuries, provide eligibility requirements, and preserve amateurism.\footnote{The meeting at the Palmer House in Chicago in 1895 had been convened by President James H. Smart of Purdue and was attended by presidents of seven Midwestern institutions: Chicago, Illinois, Lake Forest College, Minnesota, Northwestern, Purdue, and Wisconsin. The following year, when the Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives was formed, Lake Forest College had dropped out and the University of Michigan had joined. Indiana and Iowa joined the conference in 1899, and Ohio State was admitted in 1912. In 1946, Chicago withdrew from the conference, and the following year Michigan State joined to bring the conference total to ten. It remained “The Big Ten” even after Penn State became the 11th member in 1990. For more on the early history of the Big Ten, see Kenneth L. (Tug) Wilson and Jerry Brondfield, The Big Ten (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967). It is especially useful for the personal recollections of Wilson, who was an early athletic director at Northwestern and succeeded Major John L. Griffith to become the Big Ten’s second commissioner in 1944. Other histories that cover much the same ground include John D. McCallum, Big Ten Football since 1895 (Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1976). Mervin D. Hyman and Gordon S. Jr. White, Big Ten Football (New York: Macmillan Publishing 1977). However, in each of these books, the authors take a celebratory approach to football, focusing on star athletes, big games, and memorable plays and providing little in the way of critical scrutiny of the game or its place on college campuses.} At a follow-up meeting in 1896, each school sent a faculty representative to signal that athletics were under the supervision of the faculty and not the athletic associations, coaches, and alumni. In light of the curricular controversies underway, the concept of faculty control of sports was remarkably bold. Chu argued that the formation of the Western Conference marked a shift in the organization of higher education. Rather than determining an educational objective, devising a program to meet the objective, and attracting the resources to fund the program, the
reverse became the norm with football. The resources provided by the gate receipts insured the continuation of the program which then needed to be imbued with educational purpose.\textsuperscript{152}

The Western Conference was successful enough to provide a model for other institutions. In college football generally, however, the competition remained unfair and was decidedly unhealthy as a growing number of athletes suffered serious injuries and even death. The tipping point came in 1905. Several players died and a number of players were injured, prompting the reform-minded American president Theodore Roosevelt to push for regulation of college football.\textsuperscript{153} A staunch proponent of athletic competition and its potential to instill positive attributes in young men, Roosevelt did not want to abolish football. He simply wanted to level the playing field as he had attempted to do in industry by breaking up the capitalists’ monopolies. In time, however, the NCAA, which grew out of the reform movement of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, would become a monopoly itself through its control of broadcasting of college sports.\textsuperscript{154}

Following the establishment of the NCAA, athletics in general and football in particular were increasingly weaned from student control and incorporated into the structure of higher education. No longer did student athletes need to petition the president to travel to an opposing team’s school or hold a fund-raiser to pay for uniforms.\textsuperscript{155} To the contrary, coaches and athletic directors assumed those responsibilities, and line items were created in collegiate budgets to support sports teams. In addition, building funds were allocated for construction of stadiums to


\textsuperscript{155} For example, the papers of George W. Atherton, president of Penn State from 1882 to 1906, contain a file of student petitions that request permission to hold games, travel to games, and hold dances, lectures, and other events to raise money for athletics. See: Student Petitions, 1882-1982. George W. Atherton Papers, AU05.11, Box 11, Group 6, PSULSC.
hold the spectators whose paid attendance provided a steady revenue stream. In light of their broad foundational mandate, land-grant universities could accommodate athletics into the curriculum with relative ease. At the three institutions in this study, examinations of governing board minutes, campus newspapers, and internal correspondence found no significant opposition by faculty, administrators, or trustees to embedding athletics into the intellectual and vocational fabric of the land-grant college. In fact, it is more likely that as Chu suggested in his study of intercollegiate athletics and higher education, they justified their athletic enterprises as adding both to the financial stability of the institution and to the betterment of students by providing opportunities for physical fitness and by instilling values such as teamwork and fair play.

The former athletes and sports fans that filled the ranks of alumni associations and governing boards reinforced the character-building value of football. For example, when four Penn State football graduates were appointed to the rank of first lieutenant in the Army in 1917, the Penn State Alumni Association saw in their success “the value of athletic training in the competition for officer appointments,” and noted that “None of them had any previous military training, yet they carried off high honors in the race.” Presumably, the playing fields of Penn State were as capable as Eton at preparing young men for the battlefield.

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157 The consumption of alcohol and general rowdiness that accompanied football games were causes of concern on all three campuses, but none of the administrations or faculty appeared to consider steps as drastic as the abolition of football. One exception might have been Alexander Meiklejohn, a member of the faculty at Wisconsin who was a persistent critic of intercollegiate football. In a 1925 memo circulated to Western Conference athletic directors, Griffith quoted Meiklejohn as calling for abolition of the athletic Board of Control, charging that it “has over managed our college games, has given them the money and public place from which every other type of exaggeration inevitably comes.” See: John L. Griffith, Memorandum: The Place of Athletics, 30 January 1925. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10 “Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner: 1922-1926,” TOSUA.


Support for “mass athletics” solidified in the wake of World War I when statistical information compiled from the records of the Selective Service revealed that an alarming percentage of young American men had been unfit to serve in the armed forces. At each of the schools in this study, athletic directors turned their attention in the 1920s to programs of “Athletics for All.” At many schools, the physical education department, along with the so-called “minor sports,” was funded initially by the proceeds from football. This became an important justification for the need to maximize gate revenues. And it was one more feather in the helmet of the football hero who in addition to bringing glory to his school was helping to provide for the physical well-being of his fellow student.

Birth of Radio

In an age when colleges relied primarily on newspapers and the postal service for communication with the public, the mandate to extend their resources provided an incentive to develop new methods of delivering information. Many land-grant institutions, particularly the agricultural schools of the Midwest, became incubators of early radio. Within a decade of Marconi’s successful experiments, “wireless telegraphy” was a subject of study in physics and electrical engineering classes.

As early as 1911, Penn State’s alumni magazine reported that “the most important experiment that has ever been undertaken in this College along the line of Electrical Engineering is the erection of a wireless telegraph station” which when completed would be “the largest and

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161 This was a pet project of Griffith’s. Having served in the army during World War I, he was called to Washington D.C. in 1919 and put in charge of physical training for the entire U.S. Army. He was also promoted to major. Even after leaving the Army, “Major” Griffith was his preferred form of address. See: Ray Schmidt, “Major John Griffith,” College Football Historical Society Vol.13, No. 2 (2000), http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/CFHSN/CFHSNv13/CFHSNv13n2a.pdf.
most complete wireless station in any college in the country."  

Even before installation of a steel tower to support the antenna, engineering students were picking up messages from coastal stations and ships at sea. The students could also take partial credit for the first broadcast of sorts of Penn State football. In October of 1911, they arranged to receive regular updates of the Penn State-University of Pennsylvania game from wireless operators using the Marconi station on top of Wanamaker’s Department Store in Philadelphia—a distance of about 200 miles.  

Wisconsin’s first use of radio in intercollegiate athletics may have taken place as early as 1916 when the Badgers traveled to Iowa City for a basketball game. A professor of electrical engineering at Iowa State University suggested that his institution and Wisconsin use their wireless stations to send pre-arranged telegraphic updates of the game to Wisconsin at regular intervals. It is not clear whether the plan was implemented, however, it would have been a point-to-point communication versus true broadcasting intended for general public reception. Nonetheless, it is indicative of the interest in sports as radio content. The following year, Wisconsin conducted an actual broadcast of a home basketball game against Ohio State. Although still using wireless telegraphy, the game action was “received by Buckeye fans as fast as the plays were made,” according to a story in Wisconsin’s student paper, the Daily Cardinal.  

As at college campuses, makeshift wireless stations quickly sprouted as radiotelegraphy became a popular hobby for amateurs who communicated via homemade devices using the dot-and-dash system of Morse code. For many “hams” as the amateur operators were known, the mystique of radio was simply its capacity to connect with another person across vast spaces. The

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164 Arthur H. Ford to M.C. Beebe, 30 December 1915. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Box 1, Folder 003: Listeners, E-H, Steenbock Library.  
message did not matter so much as the distance achieved.\textsuperscript{166} In her history of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL), Douglas noted that “it was the amateurs who demonstrated that, in an increasingly atomized and impersonal society, the nascent broadcast audience was waiting to be brought together.”\textsuperscript{167}

Along with weather, broadcasting of intercollegiate sports is among the earliest demonstration of the potential to reach many interested listeners through a single transmission. Most early commercial developers thought of radio as a point-to-point form of coded communication similar to the telegraph or telephone. The tendency of radio signals to scatter in the atmosphere was seen as a hurdle to be overcome before the technology could be commercially viable. Corporate developers envisioned it as a means of sending information along pathways that could not accommodate telegraph lines such as ship-to-shore communications. Radio was also seen as a back-up technology to the tested modes of communication. For example, when a severe sleet storm felled telegraph lines in central Pennsylvania in the winter of 1911-12, the Pennsylvania Railroad Company enlisted a Penn State electrical engineering professor for use of his wireless station. Afterwards, he was asked to help establish an emergency service to be used in the event of future communication outages.\textsuperscript{168} Similarly, in 1913, when rivers all over Ohio flooded after days of heavy rainfall in what is generally regarded as that state’s worst natural disaster, the University’s wireless operator provided the only means of communication between Columbus and the outside world.\textsuperscript{169}


\textsuperscript{168} J.O. Keller, “History of the Pennsylvania State College Station WPSC,” April 22, 1936. Vice President for Student Affairs, A 67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, PSULSC.

In one of the earliest wireless regulatory efforts, the U.S. Congress passed the Radio Act of 1912 which required radio operators to be licensed by the Department of Commerce and Labor and to operate on assigned wavelengths. Among the first to be licensed under the new law were Ohio State, Penn State, and the University of Wisconsin. Issued “experimental licenses,” the collegiate amateurs focused mainly on technical proficiency—extending the reach of radio, improving the quality of the signals, and developing voice capability. At each of these college campuses, work on radio advanced steadily until the U.S. entry into World War I in 1917. For reasons of national security, the federal government banned radio transmissions and ordered non-government radio stations to be sealed for the duration of the war. However, radio continued to have a presence at Ohio State, Penn State, and Wisconsin as each became a training center for wireless telegraphers in the Signal Corps. In addition, while the ban was still in effect, Wisconsin received government approval to resume operations in order to continue radio research that had military applications.

Meanwhile, the government sanctioned and oversaw the pooling of radio patents by several national companies—notably General Electric, Westinghouse, and AT&T. Consequently, radio progressed rapidly. As Archer noted in his early history of radio, “The government could do what private firms could not—combine the scientific resources of all electrical manufacturers in one common endeavor.” By war’s end, voice transmission had emerged, and radio was poised

to become an industry. The radio manufacturers, primarily represented by the Radio Corporation of America, or RCA, were best positioned to exploit the new technology. But the re-opened college stations were not far behind.

Wisconsin, which had continued its research throughout the war, led the pack. In fact, Wisconsin’s experimental station offered evidence of what could be done with governmental support. Both the army and navy had contributed equipment to the University’s wartime research. Following the war, much of the surplus equipment was acquired at low cost by the physics department. Among the apparatuses that jump-started Wisconsin’s post-war radio efforts was a 300-foot antenna that could transmit messages across 1,500 miles and receive messages from 4,000 miles away. Due to an exemption the government had made for Wisconsin, University researchers were largely unaffected by the wartime ban that remained in place for six months after the 1918 Armistice. Taking advantage of its military connections, Wisconsin initiated voice transmissions with the Great Lakes Naval Training Station beginning in March of 1919.175

According to the account of Malcolm Hanson, one of the early operators of Wisconsin’s experimental station, the University had begun a regular schedule of voice broadcasting by the fall of 1920—just days after Pittsburgh’s station KDKA made media history for the same accomplishment.176

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176 Randall Davidson, "9XM Talking," (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p.37. Other records indicate that regular broadcasting began in 1921. A marker on Wisconsin’s campus proclaims WHA to be “the oldest station in the nation” by virtue of regular broadcasts said to have begun in 1919. Over the years, the station qualified its foundational status by referring to itself as the oldest educational radio station, although even that claim has been challenged. Nonetheless, both Earle M. Terry and Harold B. McCarty frequently invoked the pioneering status of WHA in their struggles with the FRC and FCC as a reason that their station had earned a spot in the broadcast band. WHA’s claim to be first is explored in greater detail in: R.Franklin Smith, “Oldest Station in the Nation?” *Journal of Broadcast*, Vol.4, No.1, (1959-60), pp. 40-55.
With the advent of regularly scheduled broadcasts on stations around the country, sales of radio sets took off. In 1922, Americans spent more than $60 million on radio sets. In addition, tens of thousands of amateurs were building their own sets and often making transmitters as well. In an effort to exert some control over radio transmission the Commerce Department began issuing licenses in 1921 under the designation of “broadcasting,” rather than simply “radio telegraphy.” Some college stations immediately upgraded their experimental designations or applied for new licenses in the more prestigious class. In 1922, Ohio State, Penn State, and the University of Wisconsin were granted licenses and assigned new call letters—WEAO, WPAB, and WHA respectively.

The programming of land-grant stations was as broad and diverse as their curricular and extracurricular offerings. Athletics was part of the programming from the start. Commercial stations had also discovered the listening public’s appetite for college football. In 1922, Westinghouse station WJZ in Newark, New Jersey announced that it would air college football games played at the Polo Grounds on fall Saturdays. In the event that no important game was scheduled for the Polo Grounds, the station would choose a more interesting contest from among eastern schools. “The radio audience will not only hear of the plays the moment they are made, but the cheering and songs of the colleges will be just as clear as was the clamor of the world’s series [sic] crowd,” the article promised. The magazine *Popular Radio* likewise trumpeted the capacity of voice transmission to create the illusion that a distant listener was actually in the stands. As described in a 1923 article:

> Time was when the “old college grad” in a distant city tied himself to a telegraph ticker and waited for the returns of the big football games as they came over the wire, in short,

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180 “To Broadcast Games: Radio Station WJZ Will Cover Football Battles at Polo Grounds,” *New York Times*, October 12, 1922, p.32.
The profusion of radio stations inevitably led to widespread congestion of the airwaves, making transmission and reception of signals increasingly difficult. To resolve the interference issues, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover held four radio conferences between 1922 and 1925. In his opening remarks at the first conference in 1922, Hoover addressed the question of how radio would be financed. Although a staunch supporter of business and industry, Hoover believed that radio should be used for the public good, and he feared that advertising, as the primary source of revenue, could undermine the democratic potential of the medium. Various economic models, based on taxation or licensing, were discussed, then disregarded in favor of advertising as the economic base. Still, a distinction was drawn between indirect advertising or sponsorship which consisted merely of a mention of the name of the funder or the group named for the funder (“The Ray O Vac Twins now bring you…”) and direct advertising which entailed a description of and pitch for the product or service. At the Third National Radio Conference, Hoover proclaimed:

I believe the quickest way to kill broadcasting would be to use it for direct advertising. The reader of a newspaper has an option whether he will read an ad or not, but if a speech by the President is to be used as the meat in a sandwich of two patent medicine advertisements there will be no radio left.\(^\text{182}\)

Industry broadcasters took note of Hoover’s directive, but made clear that they did not want government regulators determining what or how they could advertise. Although RCA’s Sarnoff acknowledged a public service role for radio, he maintained that industry could best shoulder that


responsibility by cooperating with “the established elements that have long served our national
culture in order that the air may carry the supreme music, education and entertainment of the
country.” The fourth and final conference adopted the laissez faire approach that would be
enacted into law the following year:

Whereas it is universally agreed that the success of radio broadcasting is founded upon
the maintenance of public good will and that no broadcasting station can operate
successfully without an appreciative audience….Therefore, be it Resolved, that…any
agency of program censorship other than public opinion is not necessary…that inasmuch
as…any such announcement or program if improperly presented will create ill will, there
seems no necessity for any specific regulation in regard to form of announcement in
connection with such paid or any other program.

Essentially, they agreed that the amounts and types of advertising allowable would be determined
by listeners, although there is little evidence to suggest that broadcasters heeded the listening
audience’s expressed desire for fewer commercials.

By 1926, commercial radio had proved its potential to sell products and reap substantial
profits in advertising. That year, RCA created the National Broadcasting Company or NBC as a
wholly-owned subsidiary designed to conduct “chain” or network operations. NBC sought outlets
throughout the country that were willing to become affiliates. It was an easy sell because most
independent radio operators did not have the finances or the talent to fill their broadcast
schedules. Network hook-ups brought them prestige and programming that enabled them to
charge higher rates for local sponsorship. Within two years of its creation, NBC’s network had
grown to more than fifty connected affiliates that, according to the New York Times, could put a

183 Remarks by David Sarnoff, (Proceedings of the Third Annual National Radio Conference and
184 “Resolutions”, (Fourth National Radio Conference and Recommendations for the Regulation
186 In 1927, NBC divided its growing operation into two fairly independent chains—the Red
network which featured primarily light, popular fare and the Blue network which tended to offer more
sophisticated programming. Both networks carried football. Anti-trust action eventually forced NBC to
shed the Blue network which became the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) in 1943.
sponsor’s message into nearly 88% of the radio sets in the United States.\textsuperscript{187} The corporate heads of chains such as NBC had welcomed government regulation to the extent that it could clear the airwaves for the signals of the large commercial stations. Once those regulations were codified in the 1927 Radio Act and the networks’ positions were protected, industry officials aggressively lobbied for free enterprise policies that would keep government at a distance.\textsuperscript{188}

\textbf{The Federal Radio Commission}

The FRC was set up in part to arbitrate disputed claims to spectrum space.\textsuperscript{189} The commission members had determined that the first step in ending radio interference was to “eliminate at least 400 broadcasting stations.”\textsuperscript{190} Using criteria such as power, frequency, separation distance of transmitters, and geographic distribution, the FRC proceeded to reallocate the broadcast band.\textsuperscript{191} The agency openly favored those stations with the greatest financial investment in their infrastructures and the most popular programming because they were seen as best suited to serve “the public interest, convenience, or necessity” as required under the Radio Act of 1927.\textsuperscript{192} One FRC commissioner compared the high-powered stations to rural free delivery

\textsuperscript{188} For example, one of the regulations that tremendously strained the resources of educational broadcasters was the need to renew licenses, initially every three months, then six months. Once the field had been largely cleared of non-commercial operators, the radio industry successfully lobbied for an extension of the renewal period to three years. See \textit{Federal Radio Commission: Annual Reports, Number 1-7, 1927-1933}, (New York: Arno Press and the \textit{New York Times}, 1971 [Reprint from 1928-1934]). Fifth Annual Report, p.3.
\textsuperscript{192} In the \textit{Supplement to the Second Annual Report}, the FRC defended itself from criticism that it had not precisely defined the phrase “public interest, convenience, or necessity” by maintaining that such generalities were common in U.S. law. As an example, the FRC cited the phrase “unfair methods of competition,” and the agency claimed that the phrase would be defined by the U.S. Supreme Court.
of mail in their important role as the deliverer of “wonderful metropolitan programs to farm houses and to village firesides all over the land.” The FRC solidified the primacy of these stations by awarding them separate or “clear channels” on which they could operate at night using up to 50,000 watts of power. The size and geographic separation of their transmitters ensured that the clear channels could also operate unimpeded throughout the daytime. The remaining stations, which included all educational broadcasters, were packed closely together, permitted only a limited range, and forced to share time and frequency. As Rosen noted, the FRC plan counted on these conditions to prompt a struggle for existence that would solve the dilemma of too many broadcasters.

In its First Annual Report, the FRC said that the public was expected to determine the contours of radio. “It is for you [the public] to say whether it [radio] shall degenerate into a mere plaything or develop into one of the greatest forces in the molding of our entire civilization.” Although the FRC did not elaborate on how citizens could provide input, industry officials insisted that radio content should be based on no standard other than popular appeal. This was in stark contrast to the vision of radio that had developed at the land-grant institutions. They did not dispute the standard used by the commercial industry. But they argued vehemently for an additional and alternative standard for programming that targeted selective audiences rather than mass audiences. This alternative view was expressed by Herman James, the president of the University of South Dakota:

following a gradual process of decisions. Such flexibility was needed, the FRC, said, until “all eventualities” could be foreseen. See: p.167.

...the question of how many people listen in is not involved in the question of the value of the program, for a worthless program listened to by one hundred million people would be improperly taking the wave lengths from a useful educational program or series of programs listened to by a few thousand people...It is no more an argument against educational programs to say that few people listen to them, and therefore say that they can be cut off or cut down, than it would be to say that because only one million students are in colleges and universities out of a potential ten million therefore colleges and universities should be discontinued. 197

At least one university president questioned the premise of the industry’s logic.

According to L.D. Coffman of the University of Minnesota:

One of the arguments sometimes advanced by commercial companies is that educational institutions will never be able to do successful broadcasting because they cannot hire the kind of talent which the public wants. It is just possible that the commercial companies may be in error as to what the public wants. 198

As McChesney has noted, the inability of educators to agree on either the problem or the solution led to a split in their ranks. In 1930, with their licenses in jeopardy, proponents of non-profit radio organized into two factions that advocated different approaches to reform. The National Advisory Committee on Radio Education (NACRE) was headed by Dr. Levering Tyson, the Columbia University professor who also directed the American Association for Adult Education. Funded by the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefellers, NACRE advocated a partnership between educators and commercial broadcasters. Although Tyson acknowledged the FRC’s policies of favoritism toward the commercial industry, he did not see commercial broadcasters as the problem. Rather, NACRE envisioned them as the solution, reasoning that a marriage of academic

content with the production values of commercial radio would best position educators to exploit the airwaves while enabling commercial stations to meet their public service responsibilities.  

In stark contrast to NACRE and its conciliatory strategies was the National Committee on Education by Radio (NCER) which was created at the behest of U.S. Commissioner of Education William John Cooper in 1930. It was comprised of representatives from the Association of Land Grant Colleges, the National Educational Association, educational radio managers, and others. Funded primarily by a grant from the Payne Foundation, the NCER aggressively lobbied Congress for the preservation of a portion of the broadcast ban for non-commercial stations in the belief that commercial radio was not a trustworthy partner. In 1931, the NCER supported the Fess Bill which stipulated that at least 15% percent of all radio channels would be given to non-commercial broadcasters. In 1934, the NCER supported the Wagner-Hatfield Amendment which upped the portion of channels reserved for educators to 25%. Neither measure passed.

As Eugene E. Leach documented in his incisive study of radio’s “Cooperation Doctrine,” some commercial stations gladly carried instructional programming produced by local educators—until a buyer came along for that airtime. During those brief years of cooperation—which coincided with the formation of the American radio regulatory system—the sense of urgency in preserving independent educational stations appeared to dissipate, in part thanks to industry insiders such as Henry Bellows. Manager of a commercial radio station in St. Paul,

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201 Named for Ohio Senator Simeon D. Fess, the Fess Bill was never reported out of committee. The Wagner-Hatfield Amendment, sponsored by New York Senator Robert F. Wagner and West Virginia Senator Henry D. Hatfield, garnered considerable support before it was voted down in the course of the debate that led to passage of the 1934 Communications Act.

Bellows was one of the original commissioners of the FRC and later became a CBS vice president. He also held various leadership positions in the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), a trade organization that lobbied for a free market system and no channel reservations for educators. In 1931, he claimed that commercial radio had plenty of unsold time on its hands that educators could have “with only the provision that they must not bore the listeners too much.” Bellows’ missed no opportunity to chide educational broadcasters for “their records [that] are eloquent of failure.” He insisted that “the State universities could have, without cost to them, five times as many hours on commercial broadcasting stations as they are now using.” Bellows’ viewpoint typified the outlook of much of the radio industry. Some undoubtedly were genuine in their belief that commercial broadcasters were doing educators a favor by offering them airtime and relieving them of the need to maintain their own stations. And Bellows almost surely had a valid point in noting that many educational programs were dry compared to the comedies, dramas, jazz, and orchestra music featured on commercial stations. Yet, it became clear that Bellows was wrong in at least one respect. He had claimed that even if they could sell all their time, commercial operators would not do so because listeners would not tolerate a radio station with no sustaining programs. In fact, as radio demonstrated its profitability, sustaining programs increasingly were pushed to times when relatively few listeners were tuned in. Industry then cited those low ratings to prove its contention that there was no market for educational fare. In essence, as Leach maintained, the Cooperation Doctrine bought the industry time to become so entrenched that educators could never catch up. Most experiments in alternative funding systems had ended in failure by 1934 when the Federal Communications Act endorsed the earlier framework and established the FCC as a permanent regulatory agency to oversee the airwaves.

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204 Ibid.
205 Ibid.
effect, federal lawmakers had devised a legal and financial framework that gutted educational radio and then pointed to their collapse as proof that broadcasting could not exist without advertising.

Although a handful of educational broadcasters survived, most college- and university-licensed stations got out of the radio business in the 1920s and 1930s—some gladly, some reluctantly, and some, in the belief that commercial radio would carry their educational programming as the “Cooperation Doctrine” promised. As it turned out, the only programming most commercial stations wanted from higher education was athletics.

Testifying at an FCC hearing in 1936, A.G. Crane, the President of the University of Wyoming identified the central conflict between commercial and non-commercial broadcasters that undermined the Cooperation Doctrine:

No matter how generous, how public spirited, how imbued with a zeal for public welfare station owners and advertisers may be, the imperative requirements of an advertising-supported system created certain inescapable conflicts with social uses and purposes. A system solely dependent upon advertising for its very existence is incompatible with the greatest public uses for radio. The few remaining education broadcasters should not be forced to constantly defend themselves against the inroads of commercial interests who see a profit to be made….These educational stations…have a unique and separate part to play in a well-rounded plan for broadcasting that is to bring maximum public service.

Radio and Football

Within a year of KDKA’s first scheduled broadcast in 1920, radio was helping to transform collegiate games into national events. Big-time football schools were building and enlarging stadiums to accommodate large crowds that included people who had never gone to college. Yet, as Wireless Age observed in 1922 edition, “Radio gives the public the greatest

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football field of all—the home.” The magazine noted that every major game of the season had been aired by at least two stations, and that at least two schools—Yale and Union College—had used “the radio equipment of college laboratories” to broadcast games.

The suitability of the new medium to spectator sports was quickly grasped. In 1924, Wireless Age reported that “radio athletics” had become an inherent part of modern life, making it possible for sports fans “to fidget and twist with excitement as the collegiate football teams crashed and strove upon the eastern gridirons” and all “without leaving the peace and quiet of one’s living-room.” The big commercial stations such as WJZ (Newark), WGY (New York), and WBZ (Springfield, MA), aired most of the prestigious Ivy League games, and KYW (Chicago) carried the University of Chicago’s games at Stagg Field. The land-grant universities, initially, were left to air their own games. This was not a problem, because as Wireless Age noted in an article that discussed how radio was easing the isolation of farmers, “There is hardly a college or university in the country that does not possess radio transmitting apparatus in its electrical lab.” In many cases, local stations—including some network affiliated stations—carried the home team games, sometimes as sustaining programming and sometimes sponsored, although the school generally did not receive a portion of any advertising proceeds. As Sperber noted in his account of the rise of Notre Dame football, the radio reports were a form of publicity and an effective recruiting tool for the academic institution. Wireless Age went even farther, claiming that radio encouraged sports fans to become athletes themselves. “This wholesale conversion to outdoor sports is bound to have a beneficial effect on our national health and

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208 Sam Loomis, "Radio Brings Football to All the People," *Wireless Age*, Vol.10, No.3, December, 1922, p.44.
209 Ibid.
consequently on mortality statistics,” the magazine reported. “It is just another instance of the way in which radio is bringing with it undreamed of benefits.”213

**Backlashes Against Football and Radio**

By the mid-1920s, the growth of intercollegiate football and the commercialization and professionalization that accompanied it had drawn the attention of a new generation of reformers. Nothing symbolized the disproportionate significance of football more than the giant stadiums which were designed to be used only four or five times a year. Critics charged that the new constructions were both a wasteful extravagance and an inevitable step toward “professionalization.” What’s more, their sheer size, “which dwarfs the significance of the library, laboratory, and lecture hall” sent the wrong message to students, according to a 1926 report by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). “The enormous financial outlay involved in the maintenance of football creates in the undergraduate mind a false sense of importance,” the report noted, adding that the “distorted values” that such overemphasis on football instilled might last a lifetime.214 The situation also appeared to trouble university administrators. In 1925, Griffith circulated to the athletic directors in his conference excerpts from a report from the Association of American Colleges that expressed broad disapproval of the spectacle that football had become. Among those quoted in the report was a former university president who asked, “Are we to conduct an institution of higher learning as an amusement park?” Another educator called intercollegiate football a “strange perversion of the true spirit of

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214 "Professors Assail College Football as a Moral Menace," *New York Times*, April 26, 1926, p.1. Although the AAUP report charged football with promoting drinking, dishonesty, and academic failure, it maintained that there was an upside to the game: “...it afforded an absorbing recreation, created a strong sense of common interest and provided a ‘clean and interesting topic of conversation and thought.’”
university life." Three years later, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching concluded a comprehensive study of intercollegiate athletics, requested by the NCAA, with a scathing report that seemed to confirm an about-face from the spirit of amateurism so widely professed in higher education. Entitled *American College Athletics*, the report enumerated some of the worst practices of intercollegiate athletics including coaching salaries that dwarfed faculty pay, lower academic standards for student-athletes, alumni recruitment and subsidization of players, and the treatment of athletes with pain-killing nostrums that allowed them to play through injury and fatigue. Other reports and critiques of intercollegiate athletics had covered much the same ground as the Carnegie Report, but this study created more than the usual ripple of interest because it challenged the very foundation and structure of college sports. It also named names. Ohio State, Penn State, and Wisconsin were each mentioned as exemplars of what was wrong in college sports. Although the Carnegie Report noted media coverage of athletics, its criticism was focused primarily on newspapers. When radio broadcasts of football games did finally come under scrutiny, it was the coaches and athletic directors who raised the issue.

As early as 1927, at least one athletic director had decided that radio was to blame for declining game attendance. M.F. Ahearn at the Kansas State Agricultural College claimed that game broadcasts were keeping fans near their receiver sets instead of in the stands for home games.

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215 John L. Griffith to Directors of Athletics of the Western Conference, "Memorandum: The Place of Athletics" 30 January 1925. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10, Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner: 1922-1926, TOSUA. Griffith told the athletic directors that in light of the feedback from administrators, "perhaps we have not really sold the idea of the the [sic] real purpose of physical education and athletics."

216 There is an extensive body of literature on the rise of intercollegiate football in the 1920s and the subsequent Carnegie Commission Report. In *Sports and Freedom*, Smith argues that there was never a time when intercollegiate athletics were purely amateur, a thesis that he developed further in: Ronald A. Smith, "History of Amateurism in Men's Intercollegiate Athletics: The Continuance of a 19th Century Anachronism in American," *Quest* Vol. 45 (1993), pp. 430-47.


218 Penn State, for example, was cited for "absolute alumni control" of athletics and varsity clubs that provided special accommodations for athletes and coaches. (p. 82 of *American College Athletics*) while Ohio State and Wisconsin were among the schools noted for the “annual sums lavished upon coaching and training” (p.175), and for subsidization of athletes under the guise of employment (p.250 of *American College Athletics*).
games. In addition, smaller schools complained that they were losing fans who preferred to listen to a big-time game rather than attend a small scale one. But it was not until the Depression had fully settled over the country that most other schools began to consider the impact of radio. The decline in gate receipts did not become apparent immediately. At the NCAA convention held in December of 1930, Penn State’s representative R.L. Sackett reported that the colleges and universities in his district were “healthy and wholesome.” One representative acknowledged a general revenue decline, but he maintained that in games between “colorful teams” the Depression had almost no effect on attendance. By 1931, however, the drop-off in gate receipts was undeniable. That year, three of the authors of the 1929 Carnegie Report, including lead author Howard Savage, published a follow-up study in which they wrote that college students, along with the general public, were “tiring of ‘big-time’ athletics.” Eager to dismiss Savage, big-time football schools looked for causes other than disinterest. Along with the overall poor business climate, radio was identified as a potential culprit.

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220 In 1931, Griffith circulated to the Big Ten representatives a reprint of an article written by Ralph Cannon in the March 24th Chicago Tribune. The column detailed the problems of smaller colleges in maintaining interest in their football programs. However, Griffith may have been interested primarily in promoting one of Cannon’s conclusions—that the small schools’ offer to abolish all forms of recruiting if the big schools would follow suit was “a bit of communism.” Cannon maintained that ending recruitment would “destroy the big football games, disregarding the interest they create in education through their pageantry and glamour, just as the communists would destroy the rich man, disregarding the stimulation his prestige and elegant living gives to initiative industry and thrift.” See: John L. Griffith to the Conference Presidents, Faculty Representatives, and Athletic Directors, Re: Article by Mr. Ralph Cannon., 25 March 1931. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10, Intercollegiate Conference, Commissioner Memoranda: 1929-1933., TOSUA.
In June of 1932, the Eastern Athletic Association became the first organization to announce a ban on radio broadcasts.\(^\text{224}\) The association’s president Major Philip B. Fleming insisted that the move was not meant to deprive listeners of access to football, but to insure the survival of the minor sports on college campuses. “Football is the only game in college athletics with which the institutions can balance their athletic budgets and from which any substantial revenue is derived,” he said in announcing the ban. “I am sure that no red-blooded American would like to see our athletic activities, such as baseball, basketball, crew, boxing and other physical development activities, curtailed.”\(^\text{225}\) The next day, Big Ten Commissioner Griffith announced that his conference also favored a radio ban for the same reason—“to increase football receipts and profits, which carry the other sports.”\(^\text{226}\)

A ban on football play-by-play was roundly condemned by commercial broadcasters who argued that radio was providing a valuable public service by carrying football. A CBS spokesman said that the audience for football included many people who lived far from the stadiums and would never attend. Far from a detrimental effect, he said, radio “crystallizes a national following for the gridiron” which indirectly “has served to attract many to the fine traditions of campus life.”\(^\text{227}\) It is interesting to note that the industry’s argument in favor of radio broadcasts mirrored part of the rationale that universities used to justify big-time football on their campuses—it provided a common rallying point and it was good public relations. And as the *New York Times*

\(^{224}\) The Eastern Athletic Association was made up of 12 member schools: Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, Dartmouth, Pennsylvania, Navy, Army, Syracuse, Brown, Pittsburgh, and Penn State. Fleming, the association’s president, was also the representative from the U.S. Military Academy.


\(^{227}\) Orrin E. Dunlap, Jr., "Busy Days on the Air," *New York Times*, July 3, 1932, p.5. Dunlap was the regular radio writer for the New York Times, and his sympathies were with commercial broadcasters. In fact, he wrote several books about radio, including one that provided pointers for advertisers on how to use the new medium. See: Orrin E. Dunlap, *Advertising by Radio* (New York: Ronald Press, 1929).
radio game coverage accommodated the “countless shut-ins, distant enthusiasts and those of limited means who enjoy the broadcasts.”

The public pressure may have gotten to Griffith because by late July he had reversed his view on the impact of radio. The NCAA had convened a special convention to consider the broadcast issue, and Griffith chaired the discussion. He invited all viewpoints, but in outlining the options, he indicated his own bias toward a solution that would involve commercial radio:

The radio is a new enterprise, and we should not attempt to retard its development, but rather should consider by what means the radio may become an asset to college athletics and in what manner the colleges may cooperate to assist those who are responsible for this industry.

Ohio State’s Athletic Director Lynn St. John, who was generally in lock-step with Griffith, said that he was personally opposed to broadcasting. As an example of how radio reduced attendance, he said that on rainy game days some sports fans spurned the stadium in favor of “radio parties” where blackboards were used to chart the progress of the game as it was announced. Yet, in spite of the financial toll that radio was extracting from the gate, St. John insisted that it had become a necessary evil. “The people are used to it, and we would incur a good deal of displeasure and damage to football in the eyes of the general public by stopping our broadcasting at this time,” he said. Interestingly, only one NCAA representative at the special convention raised the issue of the public service responsibility of broadcasters. H.D. Gish of the University of Nebraska agreed that radio broadcasting was hurting attendance. But he also maintained that as a tax-supported institution, Nebraska was obligated to air the games throughout difficult economic times, simply

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229 Radio broadcasting was one of two issues that the special convention addressed. The other was a recently-enacted law providing for a federal tax on tickets to intercollegiate athletic events. The NCAA opposed the tax and maintained that at least in the case of state-supported institutions, the federal government did not have the authority to force a state entity to collect taxes on its behalf.
231 Lynn W. St. John, "Round Table Conference on Broadcasting" (National Collegiate Athletic Association: Proceedings of the Special Convention Pasadena, CA, July 29 1932), p. 44.
because football was of great interest to the farm families all over the state. “If a farmer can trade two bushels of wheat for a ticket to the game, and not seven or eight bushels for a ticket, we will get our attendance,” he said, “and until wheat, corn, cattle and hogs come up in price, I think we are going to have slim crowds, and I don’t think the broadcasting is going to hurt much.”

Ironically, the only other mention of radio as a public service responsibility was contained in a joint letter from NBC, Don Lee-CBS, and the Hearst Radio Service which had recently partnered in a radio proposal to broadcast the games of the Pacific Coast Conference. The three commercial partners said their aim was to provide a service to people who would otherwise be deprived of the pleasure of following college football. An agent for the three media companies who attended the convention reinforced the message of the letter, and he reminded the convention delegates that the broadcasting chains “are always willing to broadcast…whether or not there is sponsorship…whether or not there is a commercial angle attached.”

It was a convincing presentation. By the time the 1932 football season kicked off, the Big Ten had reconsidered its ban, and the Eastern Intercollegiate Association, after heavy lobbying from the networks and “a deluge of complaints from alumni” voted to let individual members make their own decisions on radio broadcasting. As reported in the trade publication Broadcasting: “The Southern Conference, it is believed, is alone in barring the microphone, attempts in the other major collegiate groups to impose the ban all having come to naught.”

The following year, the Pacific Coast Conference signed a broadcasting agreement with NBC,

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236 "WSM Broadcasts Game Despite Conference Ban," Broadcast Advertising, December 1, 1932, p.28.
Don Lee-CBS, and the Hearst Radio Service. Not only would the West coast schools have their games on the air; they would share in the revenue paid by the sponsor, Associated Oil.

**Sideline By the FRC**

Associated Oil’s sponsorship of the Pacific Coast Conference’s 1933 schedule was an early step in the normalization of commercial football broadcasts. But it was not simply the economic hardship of the Depression that drove many schools into the arms of sponsors. A more critical factor was that many educational broadcasters had lost or given up their own licenses by 1932. From a highpoint of 124 educational institutions that held broadcast licenses in 1925, only 24 were still on the air seven years later.237

The Radio Act of 1927 had charged the FRC with distributing a short supply of frequencies to a surplus of claimants. The FRC’s aim was to end the clutter of overlapping signals by reducing the number of stations. As previously mentioned, the agency pursued this task through its power to assign frequencies, hours of operation, and power limits, and to force time sharing arrangements. Comprised primarily of men with ties to commercial radio, the agency appeared to educational broadcasters to have a clear bias toward commercial operators—and particularly the networks. In 1930, Minnesota’s radio director Richard Price wrote to his University’s president about remarks delivered at an educational conference by NBC’s vice president. Price paraphrased the NBC official, “Educational institutions have no business on the air. If these institutions have an educational program, it should be taken out of their blundering hands and delivered over for transmission to the competent personnel of the commercial broadcasting stations who know how to do these things.”238

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What disturbed Price, he said, was that the speech was the “same thesis proclaimed rather more bluntly” by Henry Bellows, the owner of WCCO in Minneapolis, the former NRC commissioner, and a known nemesis of educational broadcasters. Price feared that such remarks proved the intent of the FRC to push educators off the air. He took exception in particular to the charge that educational broadcasting did not serve the public interest sufficiently because it catered to a narrow audience. “Educational radio from an institution like the University of Minnesota should not set as its mark reaching a universal audience. It should confine its efforts to the attempt to reach the audience of people who are interested in the kind of things it offers,” Price said.\textsuperscript{239} The FRC, however, appeared to operate on the premise that the stations that best served the public interest were those that spent the most money, filled the most airtime, and had the most popular programming. One frequent complaint that the FRC raised with educational broadcasters was that they did not make full use of the time allotted to them. Wisconsin’s H.L. Ewbank who chaired his University’s radio committee, scoffed at the suggestion that a radio station’s value to the public should be measured by the number of hours that it filled. “On such a scale a speakeasy would rank much higher than a cathedral and a filibustering senator would outrank a Lincoln at Gettysburg,” he said.\textsuperscript{240} And as NCER Director Armstrong Perry noted, “what the educational forces are trying to defend is a fundamental right, which, like the right to vote, is not legally impaired by failure to exercise it.”\textsuperscript{241}

The educational broadcasters, along with the smaller independent operators and the other non-profits were continually given new assignments and orders and required to make frequent trips to Washington, D.C. to either file or defend petitions related to their assignments. To cite one example, Wisconsin’s WHA was shifted to a frequency of 940 kilocycles in 1927 and

\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{241} Armstrong Perry to Edward Bennett, 8 July 1931. Armstrong Perry Papers, Box 32, M87-133, WSHS.
ordered to share time with WLBL in Stevens Point. In November of that year, the station was moved to 900 kc. One week later, it was shifted to 570 kc and ordered to share time with three other commercial stations. Under this arrangement, Wisconsin lost its evening broadcast privileges, even though that was when much of the audience for its educational and farm programs was able to tune in. \(^{242}\) It is likely that it also lost some listeners who simply could not keep up with the frequent channel changes. Other evidence of bias may be surmised from the FRC’s refusal to act when Wisconsin complained that another station had violated its time-sharing arrangement with WHA. It was a private arrangement among radio stations, the FRC said. Yet, the agency was quick to admonish WHA for the same charge when made by a commercial operator. In 1929, FRC Secretary (and later, a commissioner) Carl H. Butman notified Wisconsin authorities of complaints that WHA had remained on the air beyond the hour specified in its time-sharing agreement with a commercial station. “If this is true, you have violated the terms of your license,” Butman wrote. He added a request for a full report of the circumstances of the alleged infraction. \(^{243}\)

There was nothing to keep a station for petitioning for another broadcaster’s frequency. Yet, responding to those petitions was a costly and time-consuming process for educational broadcasters, many of whom were full-time members of the faculty with other job responsibilities. The archives of each of the institutions in this study contain letters that reflect the dilemma such petitions posed for educational broadcasters. Typical of these letters is one that Wisconsin’s Earle Terry wrote to the FRC upon learning that a commercial station in Detroit had petitioned for a power increase that would affect WHA: “Because of limited funds I feel it will be impossible for us to be represented at this hearing. We wish, however, to protest most vigorously


\(^{243}\) Carl H. Butman to WHA, 15 March 1929. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, Federal Government Licenses and Operation, 1916-1929, Steenbock Library.
against this request.\textsuperscript{244} Another way in which the FRC added to the mounting frustration of educational broadcasters was in its frequent demands for equipment upgrades. The institutions examined in this study each used a biennial budget process that allocated funding for two-year periods. Licenses needed to be renewed on a semi-annual basis, and the FRC typically used the renewal as a time to demand higher equipment standards often based on the latest developments in RCA’s research laboratories. The unwieldy university bureaucracy could not respond to these demands in a timely manner, especially since major funding requests needed the approval of trustees or regents who met only a few times during the year.\textsuperscript{245}

The commission’s favoritism toward the networks and bias against non-profit radio was summarized succinctly by NCER Chairman Joy Elmer Morgan at the 1931 convention of Ohio State’s Institute for Education by Radio:

\begin{quote}

The practice of squeezing these stations off the air ran something like this. First, they would be given the less desirable frequencies, the more desirable being assigned to the commercial and monopoly groups. Second, they would be required to divide their time with some commercial interest. Third, they would be required to give a larger share of their time to the commercial interest. Fourth, they would be required to meet some new regulation involving costly equipment often a regulation essentially right in itself but applied with such suddenness as not to allow time for adjustment in the educational budget. Fifth, the educational station would be required to spend on trips to Washington for hearings before the Federal Radio Commission and on lawyers’ fees the money which should have gone into the development of personnel and programs.\textsuperscript{246}
\end{quote}

Of the two stations in this study that surmounted the challenges posed by the FRC, both were located in their respective state capitals and enjoyed the support of state officials. This was a critical factor in their survival. On at least one occasion, Ohio’s Attorney General personally intervened to protest against an FRC examiner’s report. Attorney General Gilbert Bettman had planned to attend a hearing to determine the issue of time-sharing between Ohio State’s WEAO

\textsuperscript{244} Earle M. Terry to Sam Pickard, 22 October 1928. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, 001, Steenbock Library.


\textsuperscript{246} Joy Elmer Morgan, "An Address Before the Second Annual Institute for Education by Radio," \textit{National Committee on Education by Radio}, June 8, 1931, Columbus, Ohio State University, 1931, pp.4-5.
and a commercial station in Youngstown, WKBN. When illness prevented him from traveling to the hearing, a local Washington, DC attorney was tapped to represent WEAO. On November 24, 1931, FRC Examiner Ralph Walker listened to the two sides and determined that the commercial operator could best serve the public interest. He recommended that WKBN be given the bigger share of the time including all the evening hours. Bettman was outraged by the ruling. He filed a complaint in which he said that Walker’s recommendation should be disregarded because it was “unsound at law, biased, unfair, and directly opposed to the public interest, convenience, and necessity.”247 He then went on to counter Walker’s points one by one. Walker had claimed that WEAO spent no money on its programming. Bettman replied that the lectures and educational programs were developed by faculty on university time at a cost of approximately $200,000 a year. Walker said that WEAO’s talent was university-based. Bettman referred to the testimony WEAO’s director Robert Higgy had provided at the November hearing in which he noted the nationally and internationally-known speakers and performers who had been on the University station. Walker had noted that WEAO did not use even the time it was currently allotted, a reference to the fact that the station did not broadcast on the weekends except for football Saturdays. Bettman noted that Ohio State, like most universities, was closed on Saturdays and Sundays making weekends unsuitable for educational broadcasters. Bettman made a further distinction between commercial and non-commercials broadcasters: “…the purposes of a broadcasting station of a great university of one of the states, devoted in a large measure to education, vary from the purposes of a purely commercial station devoted primarily to the purpose of profit for itself rather than for the public good.” In a stinging conclusion, Bettman charged that that Walker’s recommendations represented a “complete disregard of the functions, purposes, and aims of the Federal Radio Commission.”248

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247 Ibid.
248 Ibid.
Bettman’s appeal won WEAO a better time-sharing arrangement. More important, he modeled the defense that educational broadcasters would use for the rest of the decade. But Bettman was mistaken about the aim of the FRC. The agency would continue to stymie the efforts of educational radio. And state support, while helpful, was no guarantee that the educators would get their way. In 1931, the FRC denied Wisconsin’s request to consolidate the university station, WHA, with WLBL, a small station owned by Wisconsin’s Department of Agriculture and Markets. In an opinion that stunned educational broadcasters, the FRC ruled that while education was important to the public interest, “radio is not essential in the dissemination of education.”

*Education by Radio*, the NCER’s monthly publication, carried an account of the hearing and concluded:

Wisconsin asked no great favor. Unlike the mighty broadcasting chains, it sought no great amount of power, nor did it seek to acquire other stations to form a gigantic system of monopolistic proportions. It might have been better if Wisconsin had wanted those things because the Commission normally favors such applications.

Although Wisconsin survived, other educational broadcasters could not withstand both the pressures of the Depression and the vagaries of the FRC. The University of Arkansas’s KUOA was one of the university-licensed stations that finally gave up the fight in 1932 after the FRC awarded it only unusable hours of broadcasting. The station director scoffed at the FRC’s contention that it had never cut an educational station off the air. “It merely cuts off our head, our arms and our legs, and then allows us to die a natural death,” he said.

Congressional efforts to protect educational broadcasters by guaranteeing them a percentage of channels were not successful. Senator Key Pittman, a Democratic Senator from

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249 Bettman’s process for estimating the cost of WEAO’s production was a tactic adopted from the NCER. The organization’s director Armstrong Perry had advised Wisconsin’s president, and presumably others, to include in their applications for renewals “not only definite appropriations for radio but also such projection of the general expenses of your institution as can properly be charged to radio, for example, a share of salaries of college officials, heat, light, power, insurance, taxes, upkeep and so on.” See: Armstrong Perry to Glenn Frank 9 June 1931. Armstrong Perry Radio Letters, M87-133, 32, WSHS.


251 William S. Gregson to B.B. Brackett, 25 February 1932. NAEB Papers, 1A, WSHS.
Nevada, warned his colleagues not to be taken in by network lobbyists who claimed they would provide airtime for educators. “Fifteen million listeners-in of this country are being ruthlessly deceived by the broadcasting corporations of this country,” he said during the 1927 debate on the Radio Act.\footnote{U.S. Senate. Senator Key Pittman Speaking on the Regulation of Radio. \textit{Congressional Record}, 69th Cong., 2d Sess., Vol. 68, Pt.5, (February 18, 1927), p. 4110.} Five years later, Senator Clarence Dill, a Democrat from Washington, confirmed that commercial radio had fallen short on its promise to deliver educational programming. He charged that the FRC “seems to take the view that the ‘public interest’ is best served when stations whose owners have large amounts of money and are able to put on popular programs are given the cream of the radio facilities.” As evidence of the FRC’s complicity with the industry, Dill noted that “again and again educational stations have asked for better wave lengths, for permission to use more power, and to have time upon wave lengths that would be desirable in the states where it was asked for, and that the commission has refused those applications.”\footnote{U.S. Senate. Senator Clarence Dill Speaking on Commercial Radio Broadcasting. \textit{Congressional Record}, 72nd Cong., 1st Sess., Vol. 75, Pt. 2, (January 12,1932), p.1759.}

Educational broadcasters held out hope that the FCC, whose 1934 creation was spurred by Franklin D. Roosevelt, would look more favorably on non-commercial radio. But those hopes were quickly dashed. As Mazzocco argued in his study of the National Recovery Act (NRA), the Roosevelt Administration granted the radio industry, through its trade organization, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), the privilege of overseeing and policing its own operations. In return, the NAB pledged its support of Roosevelt’s New Deal and offered its members’ airwaves to the administration for the promotion of NRA plans.\footnote{Dennis W. Mazzocco, "Radio's New Deal: The NRA and U.S. Broadcasting, 1933-1935," \textit{Journal of Radio Studies}, Vol.12, No.1 (2005), pp. 32-46.} In a November, 1934 story in \textit{Broadcasting} about a proposal to reserve channels for educational broadcasters, the headline trumpeted: “Status quo Resists Faint Protests: Even the Roosevelt Administration Repudiates
In essence, Roosevelt’s FCC had adopted the same attitude toward educational radio as its predecessor agency. While professing a commitment to education, the FCC encouraged educators to use the time commercial stations were offering them—the Cooperation Doctrine. Wisconsin’s Ewbank was quick to note the drawbacks of the arrangement. “The time offered by stations is that time which is least salable, and if this time is later sold, the educational program is moved to a later hour or discontinued.” Ewbank also raised the issue of censorship by commercial stations that might not want to touch the sensitive, controversial, or political issues routinely carried on university-licensed stations. And even if that issue could be circumvented, Ewbank insisted that some schools simply “do not care to have their programs sandwiched in between advertisements for dog-biscuits and hair tonic.” Yet, that was precisely what would happen to broadcasts of intercollegiate football.

**Commercializing Football Broadcasts**

By 1932, educational radio had been decimated; only a few dozen stations remained. Some of those that survived continued to broadcast football. Their financial distress made some of them more amenable either to advertising on their own air or to selling their broadcast rights to commercial stations. The University of Minnesota, for example, granted exclusive broadcasting

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256 Ellis Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly: A Study in Economic Ambivalence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). Hawley and others have noted the essential conservatism of Roosevelt’s administration. Hawley, for example, examined the National Industrial Recovery Act which required trade organizations to work with the government to establish codes on employment, wages, and the economy. In reality, however, they often shaped those codes to benefit industry rather than workers. In the case of radio, the NAB was the trade organization. Although it represented all broadcasters, its allegiance was almost exclusively with commercial stations and it actively promoted the “American system.”

privileges to WCCO in the 1931 and 1932 football seasons for $500 a year. It is not clear whether the University’s own station, WLB, also broadcast football games. The meeting minutes of the Radio Broadcasting Committee in 1932 do not indicate any hand-wringing over the commercialization of football broadcasts. Members of the committee discussed a plan to appeal to the FRC for full time on their wavelength to the exclusion of a commercial station. According to the minutes, the committee chair suggested that, “Enough advertising could be secured to retain the time, and this advertising could gradually be eliminated as the educational programs developed.” However, the chairman also read a letter from NCER Secretary Tracy Tyler who warned Minnesota not to accept advertising. “The commercial interests are using every effort to discredit all college and university stations because of the few that are or have gone commercial,” he wrote.

Minnesota’s radio committee may have been receptive to advertising, but it was also interested to know how other Big Ten members were handling the situation. Before the start of the 1932 football season, the committee apparently sent a letter to their conference peers asking about the sale of broadcasting privileges. At least one school replied that it opposed commercial broadcasts. “It has not been the policy of the University of Illinois Athletic Association to sell broadcasting privileges nor is it our intention to change this policy for the coming year. Our home games are broadcasted from our own station and sometimes they have been broadcasted from other stations with no income to the Association.” Yet, by the time gate receipts began to recover, advertising had become the norm in radio. In the fall of 1933, the New York Times

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259 Ibid.
260 Ibid.
reported that the “turnstile have been clicking faster than at any time since 1929.” It was a hopeful sign that intercollegiate football, along with the nation’s economy in general, had begun the long, slow climb out of depression. The Times praised football not just for its financial recovery, but for a return to a “purer” basis in the wake of purported reforms triggered by the Carnegie Report. Some athletic directors asserted that the silver lining of the Depression was a forced de-emphasis on football. Northwestern’s athletic director Kenneth “Tug” Wilson declared that the Depression had made better business men out of college officials. (That might be translated as finding new sources of income because Northwestern sold its broadcast rights for the 1933 season to the Yeast Foam Company for an unspecified amount). Not everyone was pleased with the perceived dampening of football hysteria. Princeton’s coach H.O. Crisler bemoaned what he believed to be a loss of the fierce loyalties that had marked pre-Depression fans. He claimed that when his Tigers did not play a big-name team, fans stayed home and listened on the radio.

With their own stations pushed out of the marketplace, colleges and universities gradually bowed to industry requests for broadcast privileges, even though commercial stations grew less inclined to carry football as sustaining programming. At first, sponsors’ names were announced at the top and bottom of the broadcasts and at the half. Gradually, however, commercial messages laced the broadcasts at pre-arranged points. Although appreciative of the radio publicity their schools received, some college and university officials openly chafed at the idea that commercial stations were making money from their sports programs. If sponsorship was inevitable, many school officials believed they deserved a piece of the pie.

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263 Ibid.
One new way of doing business was announced by Chevrolet in October of 1934. In lieu of sponsoring a single national broadcast of a weekly football game, Chevrolet officials said they would simultaneously carry seven different sectional games each Saturday, using a variety of regional networks and stations. The idea was to give listeners in each area the opportunity to follow the game that was of most interest to them. According to Broadcasting magazine, Chevrolet would follow the model of Associated Oil’s sponsorship of the Pacific Coast Conference by paying the university athletic associations for the privilege of broadcasting.\textsuperscript{266} The 56 games that Chevrolet planned to sponsor in 1934 included institutions in the east, the Southwestern Conference, and several Big Ten schools—Michigan, Minnesota, Chicago, and Northwestern. Although no figure was cited for the Big Ten or the eastern universities, the magazine speculated that the Southwestern Conference would receive about $30,000. Chevrolet’s move partially addressed a complaint among football fans with no attachments to particular universities. These fans wanted broadcasters to divvy up the Saturday schedule to put as many games on the air as possible rather than having one or more stations airing the same game in the same market. Broadcasters generally blamed the colleges and universities for that situation because they each had individual policies that governed what could be broadcast and how many times a year a game might be “microphoned.”\textsuperscript{267}

With Chevrolet’s deal in place, the discussion within the NCAA changed from whether to allow sponsored broadcasts to how to get a bigger piece of the ad revenue pie. The extent to which commercial broadcasting had begun to overcome any ideological objections among educators is summed up in the following statement by the faculty representative to the NCAA from Texas in the Southwest Conference:

\textsuperscript{266} "Chevrolet Sponsors 56 Football Games," Broadcasting, October 13, 1934, p.12.
Of course, if the schools are playing football for financial reasons, it behooves them to make such arrangements as will result in bringing in as large an income as possible and in checking any program that interferes with that income. On the other hand, if the schools refuse to allow broadcasting they are arousing antagonism among the public at large and especially among their own ex-students who find it impossible at time to attend the games. The solution seems to be to enter into some arrangements with the broadcasting companies by which the companies and the schools can share in the income from the sponsors. 268

Remarkably, what was presented as two sides of an issue, bridged by a compromise, was actually a single endorsement of commercial broadcasts in which the school would get a cut of the revenue and alumni would be appeased. Another interesting aspect of the willingness to commercialize football is that the game was still defended as a critical component of higher education. In fact, throughout the Depression, football was singled out by faculty, coaches, and political and business leaders as a beacon in dark times. At the 1934 NCAA Convention, Nebraska Coach Dana Bible delivered a talk titled “The Educational Value of Football” in which the lessons of the collegiate gridiron might have been read as metaphors for dealing with the Depression. He noted that football was a laboratory for life where young men learned not only how to disregard pain, subordinate their interests to the group, and call up their last reserves of strength and courage. They also learned how to meet defeat. Such lessons, Bible maintained, were “at the heart of the development of an individual toward good and useful citizenship.”269

In September of 1936, Yale announced that it had sold exclusive broadcast rights to the Atlantic Refining Company which would sponsor six football games on the Mutual Broadcasting Company. For the privilege of mentioning oil before the game and between quarters, the oil company would pay $20,000 to Yale.270 Athletic officials at Yale said they had shopped around for the best deal, seeking to avoid sponsored products “that might ridicule the college or serve as

the basis of jokes,” (a standard that permitted cigarettes, but found beauty creams and cosmetics to be unacceptable). Although Yale was not the first to sell its broadcast rights, its action nonetheless created a stir, perhaps because of its elite position atop the world of intercollegiate football. It would appear that other schools, perhaps not wanting to lead the way, were happy to follow Yale’s example. Within days of Yale’s announcement, major universities announced their own broadcast plans for the season. Michigan (although it had sold its rights as early as 1934), announced a deal with Kelloggs for $4,000 a game. Arkansas sold its broadcasting rights to the Humble Oil & Refining Company for $2,000. General Foods bought the rights to games played at four mid-west institutions, and even matched the schools with individual products—Post Toasties for Kansas; Huskies for Iowa. The number of stations that chose a commercial route was revealed in 1936 in the results of a survey conducted by the Bureau of Educational Research at Ohio State. The bureau’s study of 74 colleges and universities showed that 30 permitted athletic broadcasting, including 24 that sold the broadcast rights. Eleven did not sell their rights, and 36— including Penn State—banned any broadcasts. Among those listed as “probably” having sponsors was Illinois which was in negotiations with the Socony-Vacuum Oil Company—four years after declaring its intentions to remain commercial-free.

If any football schools still had qualms about commercializing their football broadcasts, the NCAA absolved them of their anxieties. At the NCAA’s annual meeting in December of 1936, a special committee that had been formed to study the issue announced that it was “entirely ethical” for colleges and universities to sell the rights to their home games. Given that commercial radio stations had already introduced advertising-sponsored broadcasts, the

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271 Ibid.
272 Smith found evidence that as early as 1934, Michigan had sold its rights to a Detroit station for $20,000 to be paid by Chevrolet. Curiously, this deal did not appear to garner the media attention that subsequently focused on Yale, creating a perception that Yale was the first to command such a high price. See: Ronald A. Smith, *Play by Play: Radio, Television and Big-Time College Sport* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p.33.
committee found “no reason why the colleges should not derive financial benefit from the sale of radio rights.” Still, the NCAA drew a line between sponsorship of games and outright university endorsements of products. At a session held the following day, a committee studying subsidization and recruiting issues reported that the tendency of some football staff members to participate in “commercial broadcasts in which the good names of the colleges and college sports are traded upon for the sake of promotion of products” should be viewed “with apprehension.” That same report also called for an end to post-season bowl games which, according to the committee, served no educational purpose and existed only for commercial gain.

The full NCAA convention, presided over by Griffith, endorsed the report, effectively condemning subsidization, recruiting, bowl games, and commercial endorsements. Yet, members also maintained that the NCAA could not promulgate broad policies. Rather, member schools were called upon to correct their own shortcomings. “Let’s let football alone,” advised the keynote speaker, Wesleyan President James L. McConaughy. “Let’s let each institution work out its own standards of eligibility.” In other words, individual schools would regulate themselves under a vague and adaptable notion of amateurism just as commercial radio was regulating itself in the “public interest.”

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276 Ibid.
Chapter 3

Ohio State

Regardless of where he may be, the Ohio Stater can tune in at 293.9 meters and hear the voice of his Alma Mater—the chimes of Orton Tower, a lecture by a favorite professor, football and basketball games, play-by-play from the Stadium and the Coliseum. 277

The Ohio State University Monthly
1925

One of the earliest innovators of education by radio, Ohio State benefitted from the programming diversity that industry critics and the FRC—after its creation in 1927—often found lacking at university-licensed stations. The radio pioneers who built the foundation for WEAO (later to become WOSU) did not make rigid distinctions between educational and popular fare. Their expressed priority was for the quality of the programming. In keeping with that tradition, one argument for denying commercial coverage of football games was to maintain control over the broadcast in order to protect the University’s image. Notably, this line of reasoning was proffered by the radio staff, but it was ultimately rejected by athletic and administrative personnel. After several years of experimentation, and under pressure from commercial radio, Ohio State reached a compromise of sorts that allowed for both commercial broadcasting while continuing WOSU’s commercial-free coverage of football. In this way, the University station maintained its foundational commitment to athletic broadcasting as a legitimate source of programming on its educational station.

Early Sports Broadcasting

In 1922, Ohio State embarked on two new eras. In June, WEAO began regular broadcasts to establish the university as a leader in educational radio. In September, the dedication of Ohio Stadium, a massive, horseshoe-shaped structure with a seating capacity of more than 62,000, signaled the emergence of Ohio State as a big-time football university.278 The two enterprises crossed paths almost immediately. Carl Linxweiler, an engineering student who helped to build WEAO, recalled that a telephone line was strung between the stadium and the engineering lab in 1922. He explained Ohio State’s first football broadcasts as follows:

One of us would stay on duty at the radio station during the first half, while the other would give a play-by-play account over the telephone at the stadium. Then we changed places between halves. The man at the station took the account of the game from the telephone and then relayed it into the microphone at the station.279

That these first broadcasts were an engineering success was apparent from the response of listeners such as the fan in Stephen, Minnesota who wrote in 1922, “I received your broadcast of the Iowa-Ohio State football game which was broadcast from your station this afternoon. Your announcements came in very distinctly over my machine which was a Westinghouse!”280

From mere play-by-play, WEAO engineers experimented with ways to bring the full football experience into the homes of listeners. By 1924, station operators were using a portable speech amplifier for stadium broadcasts that could pick up the music of the marching band from

279 Carl J. Linxweiler to James E. Pollard 7 March 1962. Centennial History, RG 8/d-4/1, Educational Services, TOSUA. Linxweiler’s recollection, recorded 40 years after the event, had been triggered by a *Reader’s Digest* article that accorded Princeton the role of first university sports broadcaster. Linxweiler maintained that “we were as advanced at Ohio State as they were at Princeton, and that the honor should be shared.”
the field at half time and the cheering of the crowd throughout the game.\textsuperscript{281} With football coverage established, the station next picked up Buckeye basketball games which were played at the Coliseum on the Ohio State Fair grounds.

In the early 1920s, there was relatively little debate on the merit of commercial versus non-commercial broadcasting primarily because almost nobody was profiting from radio broadcasts. As Columbus’ first radio station, WEAO had novelty on its side. Granted unlimited time for broadcasting by the U.S. Department of Commerce, the station’s eclectic mix of programs was so well received that in the first year of regular broadcasting, some 50 newspapers and periodicals sought to publish the radio schedule on a regular basis.\textsuperscript{282} By the mid-1920s, however, the airwaves had grown cluttered with competing signals, and WEAO was compelled to share its time with a commercial station in Columbus that operated on the same frequency. Like most land-grant licensees, WEAO’s programming material was largely informational or educational, consisting of farm and market reports, academic lectures, and speeches by prominent persons on campus. Entertainment programming and athletics also found a place in the radio schedule. WEAO’s chief operator Robert C. Higgy believed that musical programs could be considered educational if they helped audiences to “unconsciously acquire a taste for music of the highest quality” while athletics could promote the development of good sportsmanship in the radio listener.\textsuperscript{283} With such broad definitions of educational matter, any campus events or student-centered activities became fair game for the airwaves. Events un-related to the University proved to be another matter.

At least one commercial station owner in Columbus complained that the University was harming his businesses by broadcasting for free performances by musicians who would otherwise


\textsuperscript{282} "A Chronology of Important Developments in the History of Telecommunications at Ohio State University," 1970. Centennial History, 8/d-4/1, Educational Services, TOSUA.

pay to have their music aired. John Lentz, the president of the American Insurance Union, which owned WAIO Radio in Columbus, initially voiced his displeasure in a telephone call to Ohio State President George W. Rightmire. The president discussed the issue with Wright. To some extent, Wright appeared to sympathize with Lentz’s objections, even drawing an analogy to private railways that competed for passengers with motor buses that had the advantage of highways built by the state. The crux of the problem was that in early 1926 WEAO had featured several local musical ensembles that had no connection to the university. They had performed either in the WEAO studio or at the Coliseum where the station made use of the circuits that had already been rented for the purpose of broadcasting basketball games. Although no direct advertising accompanied the performances, the groups were named for their commercial sponsors, as was the custom with sponsored broadcasts—the Mono Motor Oil Twins, the May Furniture Company Orchestra, and the Ray O Vac Twins. By virtue of their sponsored status, Lentz charged that WEAO had in effect “accepted programs of a direct advertising nature sponsored (sic) by private commercial enterprises at no expense to the above enterprises.”

To assuage Lentz, Wright told Rightmire that he would try to avoid broadcasting the programs in question, although he was not prepared to rule out all musical programs by commercial groups.

Wright’s measured tone changed, however, after seeing the letter Lentz sent to Rightmire as a follow-up to their phone conversation. In a barely veiled threat, Lentz suggested that WEAO’s broadcasts might be construed as a misuse of state funding earmarked for educational purposes. Further, he advised Rightmire that “the University Station should primarily be an educational institution operated for furtherance of the education of the people of the State of Ohio and only

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284 John J. Lentz to George W. Rightmire, 25 February 1926. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-7/54, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Contracts, TOSUA.
285 C.A. Wright to George W. Rightmire, 29 January 1926. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-7/54, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Contracts, TOSUA.
that material of an educational or musical nature available at the University itself be utilized thereby avoiding any opportunity to commercialize a very important asset of the University.286

Wright was infuriated by what he interpreted to be a self-serving attack by WAIU. He reminded Rightmire that the Fourth National Radio Conference had recently identified service to the public interest as the basis for the privilege of broadcasting. “Should the Ohio State University Station make its service poorer by agreeing not to broadcast such programs in order that Broadcasting Station WAIU might sell this time?” Wright asked. He decried what he maintained was a double standard that would limit WEAO to campus events even though commercial stations routinely featured university quartets, glee clubs, and orchestras. He also noted that another commercial station, WBAV, had carried Ohio State’s away football games for several years without the knowledge or consent of the Athletic Department. This was evidence, he said, that commercial broadcasters “feel perfectly free at any time to take what talent they are able from the university campus.”287 Wright counseled Rightmire to resist the implication that a state institution should never compete with the business community. He made clear that he himself would not bow to Lentz’s demands. While insisting that he did not actively solicit such content, he nonetheless maintained that there would be occasions when the station would carry the programming of commercial organizations “which we will be justified in so doing in order to make our broadcast service to the people of Ohio as good as possible.”

In maintaining his right to broadcast material that might result in incidental promotion for a commercial interest, Wright enunciated the principle that would distinguish WEAO from Columbus’ other stations. The audience of the commercial stations was a market of consumers to be pursued by advertisers with the goal of making a profit. WEAO’s was a community of citizens

286 John J. Lentz to George W. Rightmire, 25 February 1926. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-7/54, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Contracts, TOSUA.
287 C.A. Wright to George W. Rightmire, 29 January 1926. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-7/54, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Contracts, TOSUA.
Managing Football’s Growth

In December of 1924, Western Conference Commissioner Major John L. Griffith circulated to the athletic directors a journal article by Dr. Charles W. Kennedy on the administration of athletics. The article reviewed problems plaguing college football and noted that the quick solution was to abolish the game, a step which some small colleges had already taken. But such a drastic measure would bring its own problems, according to Kennedy:

Alumni interest and support would certainly fall off; the institutions would be left with a great physical plant in grand stands, athletic houses, etc., which would yield no return; and the student body would lose a great deal of its “we” feeling, its consciousness of oneness.

288 The concession that Lentz had demanded was ultimately won by the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) under a threat of legal action against Ohio State. In 1929, WEAO began broadcasting orchestra music live from the Neil House, a Columbus hotel. The Society’s legal counsel told President Rightmire that his client owned the copyright to many of the musical selections. The Society had granted free use of its music to educational institutions, but only on the condition that any related publicity should be restricted to those institutions. The counsel maintained that WEAO had violated that condition by mentioning the Neil House on air as the site of the broadcasts. In a letter to Rightmire, the legal counsel wrote: “It is not a question of whether the university makes money from the operation. It is a question of whether a commercial organization receives advertising through the production of the program.” See: Jonas B. Frenkel to George W. Rightmire, 18 March 1929. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-7/52, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Committee Minutes: Jan. 1929-Nov. 1930 TOSUA. After a seven-month long debate via correspondence between Rightmire and the Society, WEAO reluctantly ended its popular broadcasts from the Neil House.

289 Kennedy was a professor at (and later President of) Princeton University. He served as president of the NCAA from 1930-1932.

290 Kennedy referred specifically to Reed College whose faculty claimed that the institution suffered no ill effects as a result of ending its intercollegiate athletics. Griffith believed that would not be the case at a large university with an entrenched intercollegiate sports program. However, one of the Big Ten schools with a storied football program, the University of Chicago, would ultimately abolish intercollegiate football with no significant long-term detriment to academic standing, alumni support, or school spirit.

The Athletic Association of Ohio State could certainly understand that dilemma. Still needing to amortize the debt on its grand new stadium, the association had no interest in ending football.\(^{292}\)

But the athletic department was open to Kennedy’s compromise solution, a gradual lessening of emphasis on football and a better articulation of the positive aims and objectives of intercollegiate athletics. In the mid-1920s, Ohio State had several faculty members who were up to that task due to their experience with media, their loyalty to their Alma Mater, and their love of football.\(^{293}\)

Foremost, was J.L. Morrill, a 1913 OSU graduate. After a brief stint as a newspaper reporter, Morrill had returned to campus in 1919 as secretary of the Alumni Association and editor of its monthly publication. He also chaired the Athletic Board and was instrumental in the building campaign for the stadium. In the course of generating publicity to benefit the stadium fundraising, he helped to create the University News Bureau.\(^{294}\) He was later appointed junior dean of the College of Education, and in 1931, he assumed the newly created position of University Vice President. In Morrill, the University had an administrator who supported athletics, cultivated the alumni, understood the value of public relations, and appreciated evolving media technologies, all while keeping focused on the underlying educational mission of the land-grant university.

Working closely with Morrill was Lynn Wilbur St. John, an Ohio State graduate who had lettered in football in 1900. After a coaching career at Wooster College and Ohio Wesleyan University, St. John became the Athletic Director at Ohio State in 1913, a position he held until

\(292\) According to a report in the Athletic Director’s file, the stadium debt was liquidated in 1929. The completed cost of just over $1.8 million was split between subscriptions to the Stadium Building Fund and receipts from the Athletic Department. Although the University was not involved in the funding of the stadium, in 1927 the entire athletic plant and budget came under the control of the Board of Trustees. See: James E. Pollard, *History of the Ohio State University* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1952), p. 290.

\(293\) President Rightmire’s dedication to football can be surmised from the fact that he was graduate manager of the football team in 1893 before working his way up to the presidency in 1926. See: Wilbur Snypp, *The Buckeyes: A Story of Ohio State Football*. Huntsville, AL: Strode Publishers, 1974, p.93.

his retirement in 1947.295 The Buckeyes had joined the Western Conference in 1914, and St. John
soon became a powerful presence both within the conference and in the NCAA. He also headed
Ohio State’s physical education program, and took pride in Ohio State’s program of “athletics for
all.” In an undated report on the university’s athletic elective program, St. John described the
“American” approach to physical fitness as distinct from European methods. His description is
notable because it anticipates the rhetoric of American individualism that he and Griffith would
later apply to football and that the radio industry would use in justifying a free enterprise
approach to regulation:

The day of “physical torture” in the form of calisthenics and gymnastics is rapidly fading
from the horizon….Ohio State University, like most institutions, a few years ago was
attempting to force down the throats of a long suffering student body a system of physical
training inherited from Sweden and Germany and indigenous to these countries, which
was entirely foreign to the interests, traditions and ideals of American institutions. In
1916, we decided to make a change…we offered elective sections in a fairly wide range
of athletic activities largely out of doors, thus giving each student the opportunity to elect
an activity in which he was interested.296

WEAO’s Wright also took pride in Ohio State’s athletic tradition, and he believed that
athletics had a place in the broadcast schedule. Despite seeing a distinct role for university
broadcasters, Wright had no qualms about cooperating with commercial stations if that route
advanced the university’s agenda. In 1926, upon learning that WGY in Schenectady, New York
was developing a chain of stations, Wright proposed to the station manager that WEAO join his
network, primarily for the athletic content Ohio State could contribute, namely, broadcasts of
Western Conference football and basketball. But that was not all. “We have in mind a series of
talks on various branches of Athletics as we have in Columbus and at Ohio State University men
who can talk with authority on these subjects,” Wright offered. He added that due to WEAO’s
contract with the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, “we cannot make any charge for

295 Wilbur Snyp, The Buckeyes: A Story of Ohio State Football (Huntsville, AL: Strode
296 “Physical Education at Ohio State University: An Athletic Elective Program," n.d. Director of
Athletics, RG 9/e-1/5, Budget, Miscellaneous Material: 1926-1929, TOSUA.
our broadcasting service, so that any advertising from this station would have to be very limited.”297 That may have been a deal breaker for WGY because there is no record of a reply or any further discussion of joining a commercial chain of broadcasters.

In addition to Wright, an avid promoter of athletic broadcasting was Robert C. Higgy. In fact, Higgy was the most influential presence at the University radio station during the period under examination in this study. A 1925 OSU graduate in communications engineering, Higgy had helped to build WEAO. He served as radio engineer for three years before taking over the director position from Wright in 1927. Determined to cater to the preferences of listeners, Higgy initiated audience research efforts as early as 1923. He approached audience research from both technical and content standpoints. In his first attempt to track reception of WEAO’s signal, Higgy reported receiving mail from listeners in more than 30 states.298 He also made efforts to “determine the nature of [listeners’] desires” although he did not specify a method of analysis.299 Higgy’s belief in radio as an instrument of the people was perhaps best illustrated by a project he launched in 1930. He sought to actively involve listeners by making them “regular reporters” who would critique programs for their accuracy, interest, and importance in an effort to “determine more accurately the usefulness of the services now being broadcast, as well as to determine what the people prefer to hear.”300 Football generally topped the list of preferences which may be one reason that Ohio State continued to offer a non-commercial broadcast of each game long after selling its broadcast rights to commercial stations.301 The “we” feeling that Kennedy had

297 C.A. Wright to Karl Hager, 26 February 1926. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-7/54, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Contracts, TOSUA.
298 Untitled, 12 April 1962. Centennial History, 8/d-4/1, Educational Services, TOSUA.
300 WEAO Radio Program, No. 4, 1 January 1930. Information Files, WEAO (OSU): 1922-1933, TOSUA.
301 To cite two examples, in 1931 a listener self-report survey found that basketball and football broadcasts were the most popular programs with 100 listeners reporting, followed by the WEAO Players with 79 listener votes and Farm Night with 78. See: Summary of Radio Listener Survey, 1931. Educational Services: WOSU, RG 3/f-7/55, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and License Applications, Jan.- Dec.,1932, TOSUA. Also, for the week of Nov. 14-21, 1932, a survey sent to 1,836 names on WEAO’s
identified in football could forge a sense of community that went far beyond the campus via radio. Long before Anderson coined the phrase “imagined community,” a reporter who chronicled the progress of WEAO in the mid-1920s identified the concept when he noted that the station “makes Ohio State real and definite to thousands who have never been here.”

Nonetheless, the topic of other stations carrying football was raised in 1927 at a meeting of the Broadcasting Station Committee. The minutes noted that WEAO had carried sponsored programs from at least eight commercial concerns that had supplied “worthwhile” programs and that criticism had come only from the American Insurance Union. When the topic turned to athletic broadcasts, it was Higgy that raised the problems associated with advertising. The committee did not reach any decision on sports broadcasts, but it did adopt several guidelines on advertising, such as a requirement that “formal and dignified announcements” of the sponsor name would be made only at the beginning and end of a program and only by the regular WEAO announcer. Additionally, it was suggested that the committee poll other universities for “their attitude and preparations” for sponsored athletics broadcasts. It would appear that as early as 1927, at least some members of the committee believed that commercialized football broadcasts were a foregone conclusion, despite Higgy’s warnings of the potential problems.

One month later, the difficulty of enforcing the new guidelines became clear. The president of an insurance company complained to Rightmire about a broadcast in which the announcer repeatedly mentioned the sponsor’s name—a rival insurance agency. Rightmire forwarded the complaint to Higgy with an attached note: “I have always assumed that our policy

had been to advertise any particular interest.”305 Higgy gave a copy of the new policy to
Rightmire who sent it to the disgruntled listener. He conceded that the station had violated its
own policy against using WEAO for advertising purposes. But he added, “You will realized the
difficulty in confining all persons to the rule and to their agreement, but it is consoling that we are
making a desperate effort to do so.”306

**Rightmire and the FRC**

Although President George W. Rightmire had consistently supported WEAO in his
budgets, he had maintained a somewhat aloof attitude toward the station as it developed in the
mid-1920s. But his interest was sparked in 1927 when he received copies of the House and
Senate proposals to regulate radio. Writing to Ohio Senator Frank Willis, Rightmire complained
that the bill contained no reference to broadcasting stations of educational institutions. “However,
the Educational Institutions which are interested in broadcasting educational and amusement
programs may properly feel that their activity is of such great important as to merit mention in a
Bill of this kind, to avoid the impression which will be created that radio is an activity largely to
be used in connection with commercial businesses.”307 It is noteworthy that Rightmire’s
suggestion for amending the bill was to specify the opportunity of educational broadcasters to air
programs “of an educational and entertainment character” which would encompass football
broadcasts.308 Rightmire was tacitly expressing a programming philosophy shared by other
university broadcasters. What qualified an event or activity for airtime was not its popular appeal,

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305 G.W. Rightmire to R.C. Higgy, 19 February 1927. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-7/50,
Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Broadcasts, Jan.1927-Nov.1928, TOSUA.
7/50, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Broadcasts, Jan.1927-Nov.1928, TOSUA.
307 George W. Rightmire to the Federal Radio Commission, 25 October 1928. RG 3/f-
7/50).Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Contracts: Jan.1927-Nov.1928, TOSUA.
308 Ibid.
but the fact that it was a product of the state university and thus, deserved to be shared with taxpayers. That these programs might also have had commercial potential was not the issue. By virtue of their association with the educational mission of the university—whether through schools of music, art, drama, or physical education—they could claim a place on the educational radio station. Rightmire’s concern for preserving entertainment programming may have been triggered by the growing number of college games that were being carried as sustaining broadcasts by commercial stations. Certainly, his proposal offered an alternative—one distinct enough that he believed it needed to be spelled out in radio law.

Rightmire had also sent his suggestion to Ohio Congressman John Speaks and Washington Senator Clarence Dill, the co-sponsor of the bill in the Senate. Speaks replied that Rightmire’s amendment would probably not be considered. While the proposed Federal Radio Commission was likely to be sympathetic to colleges, Speaks said, churches and other organizations might then want the same privilege “and the subject might become a source of embarrassment.”309 Speaks did not specify whom would be embarrassed or why, but his response was consistent with the radio industry’s tactic of lumping land-grant broadcasters that featured a wide diversity of programming with religious organizations, unions, and special interest groups that had specific agendas driving their content. This tendency may have helped to obscure the alternative model of broadcasting represented by land-grant stations.

Both Willis and Dill told Rightmire that it was impossible to amend a bill in conference. Their only option now, they said, was to vote either for or against the bill. Writing to Higgy, Rightmire quoted Ohio Senator Simeon Fess, a supporter of educational radio, as saying that the president wanted to place a college man on the commission so that “the colleges would be pretty

well assured of a square deal.” Rightmire’s spurt of activism on behalf of the station appeared to wane along with the prospects for his proposed amendment. When the Secretary of the Association of College and University Broadcasting Stations (ACUBS) urged Rightmire to wire President Coolidge and ask him to support Wisconsin’s Earle M. Terry for a place on the radio commission, Rightmire politely declined. To Higgy he wrote, “It seems to be better policy to refrain from wiring. The appointing officer will know that much of this interest in Mr. Terry is manufactured.” Terry did not subsequently get tapped for the FRC.

His demurral on endorsing Terry would not be the last time Rightmire would decline to fall into step with the educational radio reformers. In 1935, he would be urged by Wyoming President A.G. Crane and others to support a reservation of channels for non-commercial broadcasting. As Ohio State had secured a good channel assignment by then, he would refuse to lend his support because “we are endeavoring to keep our favorable status before the [Federal Communications] Commission.”

A New Assignment for WEAO

In accordance with the legislation that created the Federal Radio Commission in 1927, Ohio State was obliged to apply for a new license to operate the broadcasting station. Higgy reported to Rightmire that the commission would be unable to license all existing stations, but

Higgy also reassured the president that “we are in an excellent position since we are presenting educational programs that have been acknowledged to be among the best in the country.”\textsuperscript{315} His enumeration of talking points for use in his presentation to the FRC provides a useful overview of the station’s status in 1927. Among the assets and qualities he noted were: an intelligent engineering staff; scientifically solid transmitting equipment; infrastructure which included circuits to 15 auditoriums or large classrooms on campus; an extensive, year-round schedule of broadcasting; compliance with all Bureau of Standards regulations; and cooperation with federal agencies in broadcasting market and weather reports. He concluded that “broadcasting is recognized at Ohio State University as an important service and the University will maintain an efficient station which will provide service to all of Ohio.”\textsuperscript{316} To underscore what he believed to be the superior capacity of WEAO, Higgy wrote to Rightmire three months later to encourage him to “oppose vigorously any action by the Federal Radio Commission to assign Station WAIU a better wave channel than our Station, since in point of service and equipment they certainly do not deserve it.”\textsuperscript{317}

But the FRC ruling would constitute the first of many actions that would disappoint Higgy. Initially, the commission had made no change to WEAO’s assignment. Then, in the general rearrangement of assignments in the fall of 1928, WEAO was ordered to divide time on a frequency with its commercial nemesis WAIU. Before the order took effect, however, the Commission, with no explanation, moved WEAO to an even more inferior frequency to be shared with WKRC, a commercial station in Cincinnati.\textsuperscript{318} The channel assignment was also occupied by a clear channel station in Los Angeles which would have required WEAO to sign off each

\textsuperscript{315} R.C. Higgy to George W. Rightmire, 21 March 1927. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-7/50, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Broadcasts: Jan. 1927 - Nov. 1928, TOSUA.

\textsuperscript{316} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{317} R.H. Higgy to George W. Rightmire, 8 June 1927. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-7/50, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Broadcasts, Jan. 1927-Nov.1928, TOSUA.

\textsuperscript{318} Ira Robinson to George W. Rightmire, 13 October 1928. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-7/50, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Contracts: Jan. 1927-Nov. 1928, TOSUA.
evening at a time corresponding to sundown on the west coast. The station’s complaint to the FRC was met by a reassignment to a 550 kilocycle channel which was even less effective because of interference from other stations.319

Spurred on by Higgy and disgruntled faculty, Rightmire protested the assignment. He noted to the FRC that almost every state but Ohio had been allotted two or three channels on which a more powerful 1,000 watt station could operate. It may have been the case that none of the commercial stations in Ohio merited such a plum assignment, but that logic could not be applied to the university station. WEAO, Rightmire argued, had a track record of transmitting regular, diverse, and important programming that was on a par with the best stations in the country, “and therefore should be awarded a more satisfactory and effective assignment.”320

Various faculty members continued to prod Rightmire to maintain an aggressive position with the FRC. “I cannot help but feel that the situation is somewhat serious,” wrote Alfred Vivian, Dean of the College of Agriculture. “I am becoming more and more convinced of the value of the radio programs that are being broadcasted (sic) from the Ohio State University, and of the beneficial influence that will be exerted by a good station operating on a desirable wave length.”321 Vivian encouraged Rightmire to travel to Washington, D.C. to meet with the FRC personally.

In addition, members of the University Radio Committee advised Rightmire to request a larger appropriation from the Ohio State Legislature to establish a new station or to increase the capacity of the existing one. Rightmire, however, insisted that the broadcasting situation was too unsettled for WEAO to take on an expansion, especially in light of the FRC’s seemingly capricious changes in regards to educational broadcasters. “It would seem advisable to wait until

320 Ibid.
321 Alfred Vivian to George W. Rightmire, 2 November 1928. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-7/50, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Broadcasts, Jan. 1927-Nov.1928, TOSUA.
we can be assured to the extent and character of the use which we may be permitted to make our present plant before undertaking to equip a larger plant which,” he said, “may be forced into a field of very narrow operation.”

Rightmire’s wait-and-see approach proved to be too cautious. Repeated failures to request additional funds for radio meant that Rightmire would not have another opportunity until 1932—when the station, the University, the state, and the nation would be deep in the throes of the Great Depression.

**Relations with Lawmakers**

It would be wrong to suggest that in light of the FRC’s decision, Ohio State had no political clout. At least one episode indicates otherwise--the impassioned defense made on WEAO’s behalf by the state’s Attorney General in the hearing before the FRC noted in Chapter Two. Another incident, although it does not exactly suggest political clout, is an example of the *quid pro quo* relationship that existed between administrators and legislators. In mid-1930, Grant P. Ward, a member of the State House of Representatives from Columbus, suggested to Rightmire that he request $100,000 in his budget to build a new radio station. Rightmire, as previously noted, had declined to make such a request in the 1928 budget. This time, however, Ward offered to “do everything within my power to keep that item in the bill.” Oddly enough, the generous offer appeared not to have been solicited by Rightmire. It might perhaps be explained by a somewhat cryptic message in that same letter from Ward:

> There has been considerable delay in shaping up the proposition which I mentioned to you in the spring. However, it looks as if we may get a reaction on or about August first. At least I am hoping for such a turn in affairs.  


323 Grant Ward to George W. Rightmire, 9 July 1930. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-7/52, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Broadcasts: Jan. 1929-Nov.1930, TOSUA.
Rightmire’s reply to Ward suggests that the topic of their conversation was too delicate to commit to paper. “I trust the other matter you refer to which is of great personal interest to you, will develop in a most satisfactory way at an early time,” he wrote.324

The matter under discussion was most likely Grant Ward’s desire to be the play-by-play announcer for Buckeye football. He would get his wish beginning that season. It is impossible to know whether his offer of funding for a new station helped his cause. But it is likely that Rightmire interceded on his behalf. Seven years later, Higgy broached the subject of using Ward as a commentator between halves and replacing him with a new announcer. Higgy acknowledged that Ward was “a friend of the University,” but he also noted that many “unfavorable comments on the announcing of Grant Ward” had been received in the past season.325 The fact that Higgy approached Rightmire with the request indicates that the president had a direct interest in Ward since Rightmire otherwise kept out of athletics and radio. Although no reply from Rightmire was found, Grant Ward continued to announce Ohio State football games, almost certainly a nod to his influence in legislative matters. Morrill may have been distancing himself from the decision when he subsequently remarked to a commercial radio director who was carrying Ohio State football, “We are not paying Grant anything for his part in the proceedings.”326

Depression and Declining Gate Receipts

The 1929 Carnegie Report had taken the Big Ten to task for the professionalization and commercialization of athletics. Big Ten Commissioner Major John Griffith was concerned, but

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not because he had any qualms about the state of college football. Writing confidentially to St. John in 1930, he alleged that “…some of the other men in the East either wrote parts of the Report or influenced those who did write the Report. These men are jealous of the Conference…and never let an opportunity slip by to take a dig at this organization.” Griffith did not intend to ignore the report, but neither did he plan to shrink from activities with money-making potential. And additional commercialization of football had become a tempting option in the early 1930s. Across the country, public institutions of higher learning were struggling to make do on the reduced state appropriations that left major budgetary shortfalls in virtually every college and university. In an open letter to Ohio State University personnel in 1931 in which he announced salary reductions and staff cuts, Rightmire said that the Board of Trustees had declined to increase tuition. The Board did not want to add to the financial burden of students and parents who were also feeling the impact of the Depression. Acknowledging that Ohio’s land-grant university was “in for several lean years,” Rightmire said that the only hope of avoiding further cuts was to find additional sources of revenue.

In ordinary times, the athletic department would have been the logical place to generate extra revenue. But most big-time football schools were struggling to stem the decline in gate receipts that had begun in 1930. Coming on the heels of the Carnegie Report, there was speculation over the extent to which the shrinking gate was due to growing public distaste for collegiate football. A 1931 Carnegie Foundation Bulletin reported that interest in football was waning. Griffith maintained that the public’s decreased spending power accounted for the decline more so than any decline in the sport’s popularity. Nonetheless, the bulletin, along with

[327] John L. Griffith to Lynn W. St. John, 3 February 1930. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10, Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner, Correspondence (Griffith and St. John), TOSUA.
public education’s general financial woes, reprised discussions on the role of football in higher education.

At Ohio State, Athletic Director Lynn St. John shared the conservative views of the business-minded Griffith which did not always match the thinking of the progressive Junior Dean of Education (and soon-to-be vice president). J.L. Morrill maintained that the athletic program was justifiable only if it was educationally grounded. To the extent that the program engaged in unethical recruiting or subsidizing of athletes, “the soundness of any educational value in the intercollegiate program is negatived” [sic]. Morrill, nonetheless, believed that the public relations value of athletics justified the continuance of sports programs. Among the points he listed in response to the Ross questionnaire was this: “The building of public sentiment in behalf of the university through the appeal of the emotions which the spectacle of intercollegiate athletics makes possible—and which, since it is an emotional appeal, reaches a vastly larger number of the constituency than any purely intelligent appeal, however worthy, might reach.” 330 He also applauded football’s function as the main revenue generator for intramurals and minor sports. In fact, he believed the entire intercollegiate program to be of such fundamental importance that he said the University would be justified in seeking legislative appropriations for its support should the depression drag on.

Although Griffith similarly put a high premium on the value of sports, his thoughts on how to sustain them through the Depression were different than Morrill’s:

If a manufacturer in this time of depression finds that he has three lines from which he is making a profit, and three lines that are not self-supporting, it is only reasonable to expect that he will cut out the three non-productive lines. In like manner it is inevitable that the minor sports programs, the intramural programs and the required physical education programs will be reduced unless some means[sic] is found for financing the same.” 331

330 J.L. Morrill to Lynn St. John, 11 December 1931. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/9, Intercollegiate Conference, Board of Regents Questionnaire: 1931, TOSUA.

331 "Some Observations Submitted by John L. Griffith on the Paper Presented by Mr. Ross and on the Proposed Questionnaire to Be Sent to Members of Governing Boards of Universities," 1931. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/9, Intercollegiate Conference: Board of Regents Questionnaire, 1931, TOSUA. It is
Griffith’s remarks were occasioned by a much-discussed lecture and follow-up questionnaire on athletics and physical education prepared at the request of David Ross, a member of the Board of Regents at Purdue University. Ross had recently proposed that Western Conference teams pool their gate receipts as a means of addressing charges of professionalism. Griffith said that the suggestion “might be classified as a socialistic theory which our manufacturers and business men would not be willing to put into effect in terms of their own businesses.” St. John was even more to the point, insisting that Ross’s proposal bordered “somewhat on rank communism of a dangerous type.” Given their leadership positions in the conference, it seems clear that neither Griffith nor St. John opposed collective action—unless it would restrict the profit potential of the conference or individual universities. Collective action that would replenish the conference’s coffers was desirable. This suggests a failure to distinguish between the profit-oriented missions of corporations and the public service missions of universities. To Griffith and St. John, the competition that characterized American business and the competition exhibited on the playing fields of Big Ten schools were from the same mold, and that attitude was carried over into radio.

Griffith was particularly intrigued by the possibilities of radio, and he was chagrined that commercial stations were making money on college games. At a time when many athletic departments were considering a ban on radio broadcasts in hopes of stemming the decline in attendance, Griffith urged members of his conference to embrace the new medium. He reminded his athletic directors that the aspersions cast on radio had once been aimed at steam railroads and other emerging technologies. In the fall of 1931, Griffith proposed that university radio stations

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332 Ibid.
333 L.W. St. John to H.S. Atkinson, 26 December 1931. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/9 Intercollegiate Conference, Board of Regents Questionnaire, TOSUA.
commercialize their own broadcasts rather than allowing the networks to reap the proceeds generated by college football. In a memo to athletic directors he wrote:

One thing seems clear, namely, if it is worth $50,000 to an advertiser to broadcast the Army-Navy game over the three networks on December 12th, and if the several stations this fall here in the middle west have been able to sell their broadcasting rights to advertisers at $500 a game, those who realize a profit from these rights and privileges are selling something that really belongs to the colleges. In other words, if broadcasting privileges are to be sold, why shouldn’t the competing colleges sell the rights instead of the broadcasting stations? Many of the Conference universities have their own broadcasting stations. In every athletic department there are men who are far better qualified to announce football games than some of the announcers who are not athletic experts. Isn’t this a matter that is deserving of serious consideration? 334

If conference members needed any more impetus to work out the radio issues, Griffith reminded them that television was on the horizon.

Ohio State was one of the schools that had already partnered with a commercial broadcaster, although internal communications reveal some dissension on the matter. W. Webster Smith, a representative of WTAM, the NBC station in Cleveland, had approached Higgy in the fall of 1931 with an offer to publicize Buckeye football in advance of each home game to encourage spectators to attend. In a letter dated September 22, Smith also offered to make “some straight commercial announcements at no charge to you immediately regarding season tickets or tickets for various games, where and how people living remote from Columbus could secure them.” Purchased at the regular rate, Smith said, “the value of this publicity for the season would easily run in excess of $2000.” In exchange for the game promotions, WTAM would be permitted to originate its own pick-up of the home games, paying all costs for installation of lines and providing NBC’s announcer, Tom Manning. 335

Somewhat uncharacteristically, Higgy appeared to drag his feet on a response, waiting a week to forward Smith’s letter to St. John, despite the fact that the season was well underway.

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335 W. Webster Smith to R.C. Higgy, 22 September 1931. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/2, Athletic Board Minutes, Secretary's: Jan. 1931-Jan. 1932, TOSUA.
Higgy reminded St. John that their policy was to allow only a single account—WEAO’s—to be broadcast by stations throughout Ohio in order to protect the station’s own program and to limit advertising that might accompany the broadcasts. Higgy conceded that the pre-game promotions would be advantageous, and he said that a slight cost savings might be achieved by sharing the expenses of away games. However, the objections he listed appeared to make a more compelling case for refusing WTAM’s offer. Beyond the physical complications of having a second broadcast operation in the stadium Higgy presciently wrote:

It would permit the complete control of the broadcasting of games to fall in the hands of Station WTAM resulting in extensive advertising and undoubtedly considerable profit to them…It will open the way for other stations to request similar privileges which in time would result in many stations broadcasting the programs for advertising purposes only.336

St. John appeared less concerned about any tendencies toward commercialization. He okayed the deal with WTAM. In the following season, as Griffith floated plans for a conference-wide agreement on commercialized broadcasts, Morrill recommended that Ohio State continue to go it alone. He noted to St. John that “our own relationship with NBC is thoroughly satisfactory right now—and rather thoroughly commercial I might add.” Morrill said that the publicity the University was getting from the WTAM arrangement was sufficient and that Ohio State should “let matters ride for the present.”337

To Broadcast or Not to Broadcast

Griffith’s appetite for a conference-wide broadcasting contract had been whetted by the experience of the Pacific Coast Conference. In 1932, the PCC reached an agreement with the Associated Oil Company to permit radio broadcasts of west coast games in exchange for $65,000

worth of football advertisements prior to the games. Associated Oil’s play-by-play account included ads for the company’s Flying A gasoline and Cycol motor oil before and after the games and between each quarter. In addition, throughout each game, listeners were urged to “Get Associated with football!”\textsuperscript{338} According to the trade magazine \textit{Broadcast Advertising}, the strategy was designed “not to build up a regular audience, but to increase stadium attendance through the promotion of football interest, and thus to encourage highway travel.”\textsuperscript{339}

Griffith told his athletic directors that it was “a very good bargain.” So good, in fact, that he hoped to get the same deal for his own conference. He contacted the NBC representative who had helped negotiate the PCC deal and was assured that NBC would work out a similar arrangement for him. “We have an opportunity of getting from $50,000 to $100,000 mid-week radio advertising,” Griffith said. “It seems to me that it would be a serious mistake if we did not follow this up and secure the most favorable terms possible from other chains as well as from local stations.”\textsuperscript{340}

Griffith believed that publicity was the key to boosting attendance at games. Part of the decline in gate receipts, he said, was due to less interest in college athletics on the part of newspapers which were increasingly giving coverage to professional football. Griffith maintained that the Big Ten could more than fill the publicity void left by the newspapers’ neglect of collegiate sports by utilizing radio. Despite widespread fears that radio broadcasts kept people at home, Griffith believed the solution was more radio rather than less. He underscored that point in a memorandum to athletic directors:

\begin{quote}
Is it not possible to use the radio to such an extent that it will become an asset instead of a liability? In the past the chains have limited their activities to the broadcasts of the games on Saturday afternoon. If the local stations and the chains as well would give the same
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{339} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{340} John L. Griffith to Directors of Athletics of the Intercollegiate Conference, 25 August 1932. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10, Intercollegiate Conference: Correspondence, Griffith and St. John: 1932, TOSUA
publicity to the games during the week that the papers in the past have given these games, then it seems to me that the radio might be used to serve the interests of college athletics even though the newspapers may give less and less space to the contests.341

The Big Ten schools ultimately opted to deal with the radio issue individually. Griffith, nonetheless, continued to contemplate additional means of making money from football games. In 1932, he sought St. John’s feedback on three proposals for increasing revenue: raising ticket prices, selling the moving picture rights to football games, and holding a playoff championship among the various conferences in connection with the Chicago’s World Fair.342 That each of the proposals would have served to further commercialize the sport at a time when academic leaders were pledging to reduce commercialization appeared not to concern Griffith. Although no reply from St. John was found in the Ohio State Archives, there is enough personal correspondence from Griffith to suggest that he and St. John were kindred spirits. Griffith, for example, occasionally referred to their mutual distaste for the New Deal programs, socialism, and Franklin Roosevelt. In 1932, Griffith sent St. John a note that gloated over the voters’ rejection of Iowa Senator Smith Brookhart who Griffith said had been “hurling implications at our present capitalistic and economic system and by implication at least advocating the redistribution of wealth.”343 He also mentioned that a particular critic of intercollegiate athletics had been ousted as Commissioner of a minor college conference. He concluded, “Perhaps we are to witness an era of sanity in which the demagogues and the inveighers against the constructive systems of athletics and wealth will be less prominent than they have been.”344

342 John L. Griffith to Lynn W. St. John, 7 March 1932. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10, Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner, Correspondence: 1932, TOSUA.
343 John L. Griffith to Lynn W. St. John, 13 June 1932. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10, Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner, Correspondence: 1931-32, TOSUA.
344 Ibid.
Griffith’s disdain for Roosevelt ran deeper than mere political differences. To the Major, Roosevelt represented a dangerous drift toward socialism. Writing to the Big Ten athletic directors in 1933, Griffith insisted that “our athletics are highly competitive, that the Communists do not believe in competition and therefore do not believe in football, and that in a socialized state our sports, as we know them now, would be banned.” Later that fall, he reiterated those ideas when he spoke at a banquet following the Stanford-Northwestern football game:

There was undoubtedly a correlation between our athletic philosophy and our former political, social and economic philosophy. I have been trying to envision the athletics of the future under Socialism. Of course we have no championships, rather mass and formal gymnastics will take the place of intercollegiate athletics….What an inspiring sight it will be some years hence to watch a Tammany Hall politician conducting a dumbbell drill on Dyche Stadium. The band will not play ‘Go you Northwestern,’ and the students will not pledge their loyalty to Alma Mater because when that time comes we will all be singing songs pledging our loyalty to our new socialized state.

Although his remarks might be construed as fear-mongering hyperbole, there is evidence that he genuinely feared what he perceived to be a dangerous spread of socialism in the United States. In 1934, while serving as President of the Chicago Rotary Club, Griffith gave a speech in which he identified himself as a member of the “capitalistic school of thought” as opposed to those who “want someone to feed them out of a spoon,” and he proclaimed, “We have given up some of the liberties that our fathers bequeathed us for promised economic security. We have gone a long way to the left.” Later that year, Griffith asked St. John about the activities of liberal and radical

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345 John L. Griffith to the Directors of Athletics of the Conference, "Memorandum: The Survival Values of Intercollegiate Sports", 30 August 1933. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10, Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith and St. John), 1933, TOSUA.

346 John L. Griffith, “Socialized Athletics: Address to the Northwestern and Stanford Alumni the Evening of the Football Game between These Two Universities," 14 October 1933. Director of Athletics, RG9/e-1/10, Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith and St. John), 1933, TOSUA.

347 "Griffith Says New Deal Has Taken Birthrights," Spokane Daily Chronicle, September 18, 1934. As he typically did, Griffith used sports metaphors in his speech. He blamed the Depression on “poor officiating of New York bankers.”
students on campus. St. John reported back on three subversive groups in which “there is a
great majority of Cleveland Jews,” and two of the groups were “quite frankly communistic.”

Griffith’s fears were not dispelled by any upturns in the economy. In late 1933, college
football finally appeared to have begun at least a modest climb up from rock bottom. The
verdict was still out on radio broadcasts, however. For every Griffith who believed that radio
brought more people to the ballpark there was an H.O. (Fritz) Crisler, the coach of Princeton, who
told NCAA delegates that fans attended only the big games. “If there is no headliner game each
week, they stay home and listen to some other game on the radio,” he complained. Although
St. John had publicly stated that he believed radio hurt gate receipts, he made no move to curtail
broadcasting. It is more likely that he accepted the rationale for broadcasting expressed by a fan
in a letter to the Alumni Association:

With bank failures and other economic conditions in general depleting the personal
treasury I had decided not to renew the membership. However, when State decided to
continue the broadcast of the football games, I decided I wanted to add my support to an
institution with that much personal regard for the alumni who find it impossible to attend
the games. It stimulates interest in general and will pay dividends.

348 John Griffith to L.W. St. John, 27 November 1934. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10,
Intercollegiate Conference, Commissioner Correspondence, TOSUA.
349 L.W. St. John to J.L. Griffith, 6 December 1934. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10,
Intercollegiate Conference, Commissioner Correspondence, TOSUA. Presumably, Griffith would have
approved of the Board of Trustees decision in 1939 to dissolve the Marxist Club. The board’s action came
in the wake of a report that found no evidence of “widespread Communism” among the students or faculty
and that “absolved faculty members of teaching foreign isms.” Nonetheless, the report urged greater
oversight of campus organizations, and noted that the Board did not believe “that a publicly supported
institution has any right to give aid and assistance in the form of recognition and quarters to organizations
such as the Marxist Club.” See: "Record of Proceedings of the Board of Trustees," Ohio State University
Monthly, Vol. 31, No. 1, October, 1939.
351 "Headline Games Now Attract Football Fans Who Used to Follow One Team, Says Crisler,"
New York Times, December 30, 1933, p.16. Crisler had previously served as head coach and athletic
director at the University of Minnesota in 1930-31. He would leave Princeton for the head coach position at
the University of Michigan, a job he held from 1938-47. From 1941-68, he was Michigan’s athletic
director. Crisler Arena, Michigan’s home to men’s and women’s basketball is named for him.
352 Dr. John R. Peters to John B. Fullen, 5 August 1932. James Lewis Morrill Papers, RG 3/f-2/2,
Athletics: 1929-1932, TOSUA.
Before Ohio State could reap any dividends, however, it went through several years of experimentation in search of the right balance of athletic broadcasting and commercialism. In the process, Morrill, St. John, and Higgy discovered just how delicate radio negotiations could be for a public university.

**Sponsored Broadcasts**

Sustaining broadcasts by national networks eased Ohio State’s transition to sponsored broadcasts. First, there were the 1931 broadcasts by WTAM. As Higgy predicted, other stations soon followed with requests. St. John passed the requests on to Morrill with the admonition that the policy on radio broadcasting “is a very delicate matter and is bound to require very careful handling.”\(^{353}\) He noted that the Big Ten athletic directors had recently come out in favor of eliminating football broadcasts, but they did not want to make a move until other major universities were on board. Nor did they want to lead the charge nationally. Instead, they preferred to gauge the reaction at the next NCAA meeting.

St. John himself was at best lukewarm on the issue of eliminating broadcasts. He told Morrill that enough money could be made from commercial broadcasting to carry the entire expense of WEAO’s football coverage—an indication that he valued the campus radio station. He soon had an occasion to test that assertion as the thinly-stretched Athletic Board opted not to contribute to the cost of WEAO’s football broadcasts in 1932. Higgy was told that he would need to make his own financial arrangements and that Rightmire had suggested selling the broadcast to outside stations or a chain.\(^{354}\) Although it is unclear whether money changed hands, Higgy managed to broadcast home games in the 1932 season. For major contests such as the Ohio State-

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\(^{354}\) J.L. Morrill to R.C. Higgy, 15 June 1932. James Lewis Morrill Papers, RG 3/f-2/10, James Lewis Morrill Papers, TOSUA.
Michigan game, he initiated a hookup of WEAO with WTAM and WLW in Cincinnati. The

game was announced by Graham McNamee for NBC, Ted Husing for the Columbia System, and

Grant Ward for WEAO, insuring a national audience for Buckeye football.355

The station’s situation did not change significantly in 1933, although its call letters did—

from WEAO to WOSU Radio.356 The following year, however, the University started down the

slippery slope to outright commercialism courtesy of the Ohio Oil Company. The deal negotiated

by the Athletic Board, whose members included Higgy and St. John, permitted the oil company to

sponsor home games over WLW Radio in exchange for promotions of Buckeye football. But both

Morrill and St. John seemed eager to up the ante in 1935.

A stickler for following policy procedures, Morrill had asked the Athletic Board early in

the year to help him draw up an “explicit statement” of University and Athletic Board policy

regarding football broadcasts.357 Morrill stressed the urgency of settling on a policy quickly in

order that they not be forced into inferior agreements with either the Western Conference Faculty

Representatives, who were still considering a joint contract for broadcasting of Conference

games, or with the Ohio Oil Company which was expecting to purchase football broadcast rights

for the 1935 season.358 The University and Ohio Oil had tentatively agreed that in 1935 for a sum

of $6,000, the oil company would have the exclusive rights to carry Buckeye football broadcasts

in Ohio over WLW Radio. The awarding of exclusive rights was a critical departure from past

policy, although the Athletic Board did not fully grasp the implications of its decision. Before the

contract was signed, St. John appeared to have second thoughts. However, he was not concerned

about commercialization or exclusivity. Rather, he wanted to be sure he had the most lucrative


1932,p.41.

356 The University successfully petitioned the FRC for the call letters WOSU to reflect the

station’s connection to the Ohio State University.

357 Minutes, Athletic Board, 6 March 1935. James Lewis Morrill Papers, RG 3/f-2/2, Athletic

Broadcasting: 1934-1938, TOSUA.

358 Ibid.
deal possible. Bypassing the Byer & Bowman Advertising Agency which represented Ohio Oil, he approached the Lord & Thomas Advertising Agency to make inquiries about other potential sponsors for Buckeye football. In the depressed economy, however, the agency was unable to secure any other willing sponsors.\textsuperscript{359}

Morrill, who was typically more concerned about the appearance of impropriety, not only approved of St. John’s efforts, he began to take some initiatives himself. Having seen the Lord & Taylor response which St. John had forwarded to him, Morrill wrote to the agency representative to encourage him to keep looking for sponsors. “Our arrangements for this season are quite settled and explicit but it is likely that next year we shall consider abandoning our precedent to look at the whole proposition of football broadcasting anew,” he wrote.\textsuperscript{360} Still, Morrill was in no hurry to complete a deal with Ohio Oil for 1935 until satisfied that it was the best he could do. The following spring, he tried to negotiate a better deal with Byer and Bowman, but the representative simply reiterated his initial offer of $6,000, and warned that Ohio Oil’s offer would expire on April 1\textsuperscript{st}.\textsuperscript{361}

Before the deadline passed, it had become clear that the Conference was not going to come to any joint agreement on sponsored broadcasts. So on April 20th, Morrill confirmed the arrangement with Ohio Oil.\textsuperscript{362} Under the terms of the agreement, the University station—now WOSU—was permitted to continue its play-by-play coverage, but no other Ohio station was allowed to broadcast games. Additionally, the sponsors agreed to limit their commercial announcements and to submit their choice of a broadcaster to the Athletic Board for approval. It is noteworthy that Rightmire was not part of the discussion leading up to the sponsorship

\textsuperscript{359} Herbert B. Glover to Lynn St. John, 10 October 1934. James Lewis Morrill Papers, RG 3/f-2/2, Athletic Broadcasting: 1934-1938, TOSUA.
\textsuperscript{361} Herbert Byer to J.L. Morrill, 13 March 1935. James Lewis Morrill Papers, RG 3/f-2/2, Athletic Broadcasting: 1934-1938, TOSUA.
agreement. Morrill notified him of the arrangement almost two weeks later, and only after Rightmire had forwarded Morrill a letter from L.D. Coffman, the president of the University of Minnesota.\footnote{L.D. Coffman to George Rightmire, 30 April 1935. Comptroller Records, 1877-1970, Box 10 Football Broadcasting, 1934-1936, Andersen Library, University of Minnesota Archives.} Coffman had expressed concern about the increasing commercialization of football as represented by the proposed conference-wide sponsorship. Morrill informed Rightmire that there would be no such sponsorship.\footnote{According to Minnesota’s faculty representative, the Standard Oil company, with whom the Big Ten had been negotiating, declined to submit a bid. Ohio State may have contributed to scuttling the deal because the Ohio Oil Company that had bought exclusive rights to Buckeye football for 1935 was a subsidiary of Standard Oil.} He then proceeded to justify the deal he had recently struck with Ohio Oil. The only alternatives, he said, were to eliminate all broadcasting or to broadcast only over university-licensed stations. “Any other type of broadcast is bound to have commercial advantage for the broadcaster and regardless of whether money is paid the public will still regard the broadcast as commercialized,” he said. Morrill did not consider either alternative to be viable options. “If we were to restrict our broadcasts next fall to WOSU enormous pressure would be brought on us to let in the big chains for certain games, like the Notre Dame game, and we would be hard put to refuse these requests.”\footnote{J.L. Morrill to George W. Rightmire, 2 May 1935. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-2/2, Athletic Broadcasting: 1934-36, TOSUA.}

Morrill did not specify what sort of pressure the chains would exert. However, other Big Ten institutions had established no-sponsorship policies and were managing to fend off the advances of commercial stations. If those schools were feeling the pressure that Morrill anticipated, it would only have been compounded by Ohio State’s embrace of sponsorship. Some schools were still on a sustaining basis with commercial broadcasters, so they were not generating revenue that would defray the burgeoning deficits in their athletic budgets. Also, most conference schools had university stations that were carrying the games, so the audience within the range of those broadcasts would not have been denied access to college football had they chosen to use only their own stations. In fact, the public clamor for football might have helped to persuade the
FCC to award better channel assignments to educational radio stations that would have spurred their growth rather than stunting it as the inferior assignments generally did. Although Griffith was a proponent of commercialization, the only Big Ten school that appeared to be as enthusiastic was Northwestern whose athletic director, Kenneth “Tug” Wilson, would eventually replace Griffith as Big Ten Commissioner. Because of its stature in both broadcasting and football, Ohio State occupied a position of influence on the radio issue. At this pivotal juncture, Morrill chose to deemphasize the role of the University station in favor of commercial sponsorship. Also, he chose to equate radio sponsorship with print ads published in football programs which, he noted, “also tends to commercialize the game and yet it is universally done.”

This “everybody is doing it” defense became part of the strategic justification for the continuing commercialization of football and would be invoked by athletic and administrative officials at schools other than Ohio State. What is more, as he confided to Rightmire, he was relieved by the collapse of a conference agreement because it left Ohio State free to pursue its own deal:

> We should all have been compelled to accept a certain sponsor, certain broadcasting procedure and advertising, etc. which some of the institutions might not approve but dissent from which would complicate or destroy the whole situation. The better plan is perhaps the one we are following to make individual arrangements for the broadcast, thus permitting each University to safeguard its own institutional prestige and propriety.

Rightmire paraphrased most of Morrill’s points in his response to President Coffman, conceding that Ohio State’s “conduct in the past seems to have created a precedent for some commercial sponsorship” of football games. Rightmire believed radio sponsorship to be inevitable as long as college sports remained a self-supporting endeavor. But he acknowledged the “pretense” of maintaining the amateur ideal while making compromises to satisfy “the great money paying

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366 Ibid.
367 Ibid.
public.” For Rightmire, there was no turning back from the commercial path ahead. Rather than seize the initiative to control commercialism, he implied that his predecessors had painted him into this corner. “Perhaps if this whole matter were to be gone into de novo, it could readily be condemned on high educational grounds….yet [I] feel rather hopeless about putting the whole athletic business on a purity plane. Perhaps this is a confession rather than a declaration of principle” he wrote to Coffman.369

Coffman was not easily placated, nor did he share Rightmire’s sense of resignation. A month after receiving Rightmire’s response, he attempted to motivate the leaders of other Conference schools to take an active role in the radio issue rather than leaving it to their athletic directors and faculty representatives. In a letter to Griffith, which Coffman copied to each of the Big Ten presidents, he challenged Conference members to consider the philosophical implications of selling their broadcast rights. He admitted that he had been chided for permitting the University of Minnesota to sell sponsorship rights to its football games. But he added that it was a policy that he opposed—and more important—that he was prepared to abandon. Far from accepting a conference-wide sponsorship plan, he did not believe that “a mistake made on a small scale should be cited to make the same mistake on a big scale. Some educational logic and not financial expediency should be the determinative of any plan that may be adopted.”370

Far from Rightmire’s timid concession to his vice president and athletic director, Coffman enumerated the dangers inherent in commercializing college football broadcasts. It would exploit higher education by putting a price tag on the reputation of an athletic conference. It would feed into the hands of those who wanted to professionalize the game. It would provoke negative press criticism. Perhaps most damaging, it would expose the hypocrisy of universities that insisted their games met the spirit and standards of amateurism:

369 Ibid.
We have made a fetish of the amateur standing of our athletes and have insisted that no commercialism should touch the students. The boy who plays a home-town summer game, and is paid, loses his standing. Yet the universities now openly proposed to sell the game in order to make a handsome sum from the activities of these boys. It will be very difficult to draw a clear line of distinction between these actions.\footnote{L.D. Coffman to John L. Griffith, 4 June 1935. James Lewis Morrill Papers, RG 3/f-2/2, Broadcasting: 1934-1938, TOSUA.}

Coffman must have known he was waging a losing battle, because after making a well-reasoned case for not commercializing football broadcasts, he offered a suggestion for how to use the money in the event that the Big Ten should ultimately sell its conference rights. But even here, Coffman demonstrated his resolve to put the brakes on the growth of athletics. He proposed that the money be used “to support the radio stations of the various universities and to extend their usefulness.”\footnote{Ibid.} Coffman’s strategy might have served the twin purposes of providing college football to a hungry audience while taming the excesses of intercollegiate sports by depriving athletic departments of generous broadcasting contracts. At big-time college football schools, radio might have used the proceeds of commercial contracts to establish the full-service public broadcasting system that instead would be delayed for more than three decades.

**Outcry Over Exclusivity**

Morrill had planned to reevaluate radio broadcasting in 1936. As it turned out, he could not wait that long. When word spread of the exclusive agreement Ohio State had made with the Ohio Oil Company, media companies throughout Ohio cried foul. The first to express dismay was the commercial manager of the Miami Valley Broadcasting Corporation which had hoped to carry Buckeye football on WHIO. Morrill assured him that the contract with Ohio Oil was for the 1935 season only and that he would be interested in discussing broadcast rights for 1936 with
WHIO or other interested stations.\textsuperscript{373} If Morrill thought that offer would pacify the broadcaster he was mistaken. The protests continued and grew more scathing.

An early indication of the furor they would need to defuse was provided by George Arps, Dean of the College of Education. Arps was a close friend of Karl Bickel who headed the Scripps-Howard Newspaper chain. Before the football season got underway, Bickel had sent Arps a copy of a letter he had recently sent to the Executive Editor of Scripps Howard. In that letter, Bickel charged that the exclusivity agreement with Ohio Oil threatened the ability of all radio stations to have free access to news sources. Quoting Nelson Poynter, who oversaw both the \textit{Columbus Citizen} and WAIO Radio, Bickel said that the only distinction between a newspaper reporter and an “air” reporter was their method of news distribution. To deprive other radio stations from broadcasting the game was akin to barring access to the stadium to sports writers. Such a scheme was particularly unconscionable, Bickle said, because it involved Ohio State. “Any official function of the University and its students belongs to the whole people,” he said. “A state or municipal university cannot in my judgment defend giving to any special interest any monopolistic special privilege.”\textsuperscript{374} Bickel noted that the \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer} owned three radio stations; the \textit{Dispatch} had two; and the \textit{Akron Beacon-Journal} and Scripps-Howard had one apiece plus associate stations. “Naturally we cannot be interested in letting the situation [wait] until next year,” he said. “We are faced with the fact that our state university, which has had the properly unstinted loyalty of our papers for years, has bartered away what we assumed, as newspaper people, were our natural rights to report, any way we desired, Ohio State’s football games.”\textsuperscript{375} There was no doubt some posturing on Bickel’s part. In fact, he admitted that he would have bought exclusive rights to newspaper reporting of the games had they been offered to

\textsuperscript{373} J.L. Morrill to J.L. Reinsch, 11 July 1935. RG 3/f-2/2, Athletic Broadcasting: 1934-1938, TOSUA.
\textsuperscript{375} Ibid.
him, especially in light of the low price he believed the University was commanding for a commodity as hot as Buckeye football. He was stunned, he said, that “the University would toss over its virginity as cheaply as that.”376 Yet his letter gave Morrill and St. John their first indication of the vitriolic attacks that would be unleashed in the pages of Ohio’s newspapers.377

Although newspapers were calling for Ohio State to void its contract with the oil company, neither Morrill nor Rightmire thought that would be possible.378 To the publisher of the Dayton Daily News, Morrill explained that the University’s legal counsel had cautioned him against rescinding the existing contract. The publisher scoffed in reply, “Would he [the legal counsel] pretend to believe that an oil company, dependent upon public good will, would bring suit against a state university for damages?”379 After meeting with Bickel and Nelson Poynter, Morrill apparently decided to pursue the matter with Ohio Oil to see if it would be possible to arrange for the Scripps-Howard station, WCPO, to broadcast the games. To Morrill’s surprise, the oil company agreed to allow WCPO to hook in on the WOSU broadcast with one proviso. WCPO would carry a short announcement, crediting the broadcast to Ohio Oil.380 The solution was acceptable to Poynter and Bickel.381 But there were others to be reckoned with.

With the approach of the highly hyped Ohio State-Notre Dame game to be played in Columbus, both NBC and Columbia wanted to carry the broadcast. Morrill turned them down, citing the exclusivity agreement. Both networks seemed to be resigned to not carrying the game.

376 Ibid.
377 It is somewhat surprising that neither Morrill nor St. John anticipated the problem because the hostilities among various media were playing out that year in what is commonly known as the Press-Radio War—a battle to control news and information dissemination that pitted publishers and news wires against radio.
381 Karl A. Bickel to J.L. Morrill, 26 September 1935. James Lewis Morrill Papers, RG 3/3-2/2, Athletic Broadcasting: 1934-38, TOSUA.
NBC’s vice president reported to Morrill that he was getting deluged with telephone calls, but he did not pressure Morrill to make an exception for NBC. He simply mentioned his regret that he would not be able “to tell the world about it. It’s just darned tough.”382 Four days before the big game, Morrill learned that Ohio Oil had given broadcasting rights to the Mutual Broadcasting Company under the same condition as Scripps Howard—that the Mutual stations carry the credit line for Ohio Oil. According to the account that Morrill provided to the press editor of the Cleveland Press, when he found out about the Mutual arrangement, he demanded that Ohio Oil grant the same privilege to NBC and Columbia. The oil company acceded to the demand, and both networks gratefully accepted the game on Ohio Oil’s terms. However, the local Cleveland affiliates for each network refused to carry the plug for the oil company. The Cleveland Press then orchestrated a protest that included letters and petitions to Ohio Oil and exhortations to the University to “forget oil and gasoline this week.”383 The clamor finally dimmed when one of the Cleveland stations picked up the game from the Mutual Network in a deal that allowed local Plymouth dealers to share the sponsorship rights with Ohio Oil.384 Nonetheless, it was a week that left Morrill scrambling for a new broadcast policy.

To be sure that the University administration had gotten the message, the Ohio Association of Broadcasters passed a resolution in mid-November calling for “equal opportunities to all broadcasters of Ohio in the broadcasting of any athletic or other public event of any state supported institution.”385 Morrill appeared to bristle at the implied criticism. In a response to the association, he pointed out the challenges of providing equal opportunities—ranging from the lack of stadium facilities to questions of commercializing broadcasts. “This is our problem, I

recognize, and not yours—but we would be very much assisted if you have any practical suggestions along this line,” he wrote.\(^{386}\)

**Going It Alone**

Rebuffed in his efforts to sell exclusive broadcast rights on a conference-wide basis, Griffith apparently decided to sit back and let individual schools work through the issues. There is no evidence in St. John’s correspondence with Griffith that the Big Ten Commissioner offered either moral support or substantive suggestions when Ohio State found itself in the eye of the media storm over exclusivity.\(^{387}\) In 1936, Morrill, who was now the chairman of the Radio Broadcasting Committee of the Athletic Board, reported that the Conference did not want to discontinue football broadcasts, but neither did it want to “make recommendations concerning the issue of sponsored broadcasting—its academic and educational propriety, the ethical question of athletic exploitation, etc.” Given that some universities operated their own broadcasting stations which typically carried games played at other schools, the Conference also did not want to get involved in the contentious issue of reciprocal radio relations. In general, Morrill reported, “the Conference apparently feels that problems arising out of the ‘exclusive sale’ of broadcasting rights are problems which only the individual institutions, and not the Conference as such, can settle and solve.”\(^ {388}\)

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\(^{387}\) Griffith made a point of keeping out of individual campus controversies. In 1932 when Ohio State’s athletic program was under criticism, the commissioner wrote to St. John, “When a friend is in a fight it is hard for me to keep from taking off my coat and wading in but sometimes when the friend does not need any help the outsider may do more harm than good.” See: John Griffith to L.W. St. John, 31 October 1933. Director of Athletics, RG 9/2-1/7, Athletic Situation, 1933-1934, Football Coaching, TOSUA.

\(^{388}\) Record of the Proceedings and the Official Minutes of the Three Hundred and Fifty-First Meeting of the Athletic Board of the Ohio State University, 10 June 1936. Director of Athletics, RG 3/f-2/2 Athletic Board Minutes: 1935-1938, TOSUA.
With no leadership forthcoming from the Big Ten Conference, Morrill proceeded to tackle the issue at Ohio State. He believed that the onus was largely on him as Rightmire’s designated representative to the Athletic Board. Although he sought advice from those within and outside the university, he also appeared to struggle with the issue privately. In a letter to Oberlin College Athletic Director J.H. Nichols, Morrill identified some of the challenges inherent to a land-grant university that private colleges did not need to address. Beyond the usual sportswriters and Monday morning quarterbacks, he said, the constituency for Ohio State football included a “real and influential general public” with a “proprietary interest in the public relations of the institution because of the fact that it is supported by taxes.” Commenting on Oberlin’s recently adopted athletic policy which apparently de-emphasized intercollegiate sports, Morrill wondered whether the Oberlin attitude contained a “somewhat Pharisaical implication” premised upon “a false assumption that in a large intercollegiate athletic program there is evil per se.” It was the same attitude that Morrill detected in the Carnegie Report, he said, which essentially declared that a “great university could not be really great and at the same time carry on a circus program of intercollegiate athletics.” (Interestingly, Morrill cited the University of Minnesota, along with Princeton, and not his own institution, as an example of schools that “are living refutations of the dictum.”) Morrill ended the letter with a tone of wistful frustration. Commending Nichols for having the intelligence and authority to set out a clear, uncomplicated position, Morrill confessed, “I seem to lack both and find myself struggling all the while for footings that will help me to be useful in this area.”

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390 J.L. Morrill, January 24 1936. Nichols conceded that the problems of large state schools were different than those of small endowed colleges. He predicted that smaller institutions would increasingly need to depend on student athletic fees and college budgets to participate in intercollegiate athletics. “This should make it easier to administer athletics on a truly educational basis and free it almost entirely from outside pressure,” he wrote. See: J.H. Nichols to J.L. Morrill, 31 March 1936. James Lewis Morrill Papers, RG 3/f-2/2, Athletics: 1935-1936, TOSUA.
The experience of Nichols at Oberlin and the recommendations of Coffman at Minnesota may have helped to persuade Morrill to try a new strategy that deemphasized the commercial potential of broadcasting. Even before the disastrous 1935 season had ended, Morrill canvassed the university presidents, athletic directors, and faculty representatives in the Big Ten by posing a series of thoughtful questions. The survey he designed raised questions on the ethics of sponsored or exclusive broadcasting by state universities, the complications arising from visiting teams with different broadcast policies, the basis and criteria upon which universities should grant broadcast privileges, the desirability of chain broadcasting and of a conference-wide policy, and the feasibility of restricting all broadcasts to university stations in the cases of those institutions that had their own broadcast facilities. Only one completed survey was found in Morrill’s papers. Signed by R.E. Monroe, who is not identified, it indicated support for broadcasting on a sustaining basis with exclusivity to be awarded only to university broadcasters.

Morrill also actively sought input from commercial broadcasters, going so far as to invite them to a conference to discuss the matter. Among the commercial media he approached was former Governor James Cox, publisher of the Dayton Daily News and owner of WHIO in Dayton and WIOD in Miami, Ohio. “We want and need the best advice that we can get in avoiding any mistake next year, and in working out a policy that will be entirely right and satisfactory to the public and to the legitimate broadcasting stations,” a chastened Morrill wrote to Cox. One of Morrill’s concerns, as indicated in his survey, was choosing which stations to let into the broadcast booth. The facilities would certainly not accommodate all the expected requests from

391 Morrill apparently did not expect substantial feedback from most presidents. In a letter to Karl Bickel, Morrill noted that “some of these Presidents are pretty remote from such a practical up-to-date medium of communication as the radio and would be inclined to give answers based on arm-chair thinking in their libraries rather than from any elbow-rubbing with the world of modern affairs.” It is unclear whether he may have included Rightmire in that category. See: J.L. Morrill to Karl Bickel, 29 November 1935. James Lewis Morrill Papers, RG 3/3-2/2, Athletic Broadcasting: 1934-38, TOSUA.
392 No evidence was found to confirm that the proposed conference actually occurred.
radio stations. Even more, Morrill was concerned that the University would “lose all control of
the nature of sponsorship and the kind of broadcasting going out from the Stadium.”

In seeking the advice of those who had been most critical of Ohio State’s broadcast
policy, Morrill appeared to mollify his detractors. For the most part, broadcasters expressed
satisfaction that Morrill had accommodated them within the parameters of the exclusivity
agreement. They also appeared to understand Morrill’s predicament and acknowledged the
University’s right to control football broadcasts. Bickel conceded that it would be proper for
WOSU to be the only official broadcaster, but only if any other station desiring a hook-up could
do so. Underlining his complaint about the 1935 season Bickel wrote, “We feel that a public
institution should not permit its activities to become the exclusive radio or newspaper property of
any single interest.” Nonetheless, Bickel would have preferred for the University to expand its
facilities to accommodate at least five or six connections.

Ever conscious of the public relations value of good press, Morrill also invited
“constructive criticism” from the Press Radio editor of the Cleveland Press who had been one of
the most vociferous critics of the exclusivity agreement. “I feel we got into a good deal of grief
this year and we want to do absolutely the right thing next year. We need the best advice that we
can get,” he said. It is worth noting that Morrill sought the counsel of commercial radio,
newspapers, and other athletic officials. That these were the constituencies that he wanted to
please indicates how closely his interpretation of radio’s public service responsibility was
aligning with the commercial industry’s definition. Nonetheless, the advice that Morrill
ultimately drew upon came from Higgy who had recommended a ban on all sponsored broadcasts

393 J.L. Morrill, "The Problem of Football Broadcasting at a State University in the Western
394 Karl A. Bickel to J.L. Morrill, November 20, 1935. James Lewis Morrill Papers, RG 3/f-2/2,
395 J.L. Morrill to Norman Siegal, 13 November 1935. James Lewis Morrill Papers, RG 3/f-2/2,
Athletic Broadcasting: 1934-1938, TOSUA.
except for those arranged at the request of visiting teams under reciprocal agreements. Higgy also proposed that only two accounts of home games be transmitted to Ohio stations with one of those broadcasts being WOSU’s. In addition, Higgy advised that networks be permitted to broadcast all games without restriction provided they were carried on a sustaining basis. Most important, Higgy suggested assessing a broadcast privilege fee on any stations that took WOSU’s feed or that originated their own, with proceeds of underwriting the expense of WOSU’s football broadcasting. The proposal that Morrill presented to the Athletic Board incorporated all of Higgy’s suggestions. Amended at the suggestion of St. John who proposed higher broadcast privilege fees for commercial radio stations, the policy was approved by the Athletic Board in June of 1936.

The new policy was a sharp departure from the previous year’s practice. In seeking to avoid the dilemma resulting from an exclusive contract, Ohio State took a decided step back from commercialization of radio broadcasts. The minimal privilege fees collected by the Athletic Board were invested in WOSU to finance the University station’s own football broadcasts. Virtually any station was welcome to hook into WOSU’s broadcast provided it did not contain advertising other than station identification. However, this was not the sort of “equal opportunity” that Ohio’s commercial stations wanted. They wanted equal opportunity to secure revenue for handling the games. That soon became clear as most stations declined to carry Buckeye football on the required sustaining basis.

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396 Morrill also may have drawn upon survey feedback. For example, Minnesota’s athletic director Frank McCormick referred to the survey in a 1935 letter to St. John. McCormick explained that the Twin Cities had five newspapers that were connected with the area’s three radio stations and that “they therefore cause us considerable trouble during the year.” He noted that placing athletic programs on a non-sponsored basis and allowing the stations to broadcast without any charge was the only way that Minnesota could retain control of the broadcasts. Ohio State’s policy for 1936 was essentially the same although a broadcast privilege fee was assessed to commercial stations. See: Frank McCormick to Lynn W. St. John, 30 November 1935. James Lewis Morrill Papers RG 3/f-2/2, Athletics :1935-36, TOSUA.


398 Meeting of the Athletic Board, 10 June 1936. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/2, Athletic Board: Secretary's Minutes: Sept. 1934-June 1936, TOSUA.
Shifting Attitudes on Commercial Broadcasts

Curiously, Ohio State’s stance on non-commercial broadcasting occurred at a time when resistance to sponsored broadcasts appeared to be ebbing. The change was noted earlier in 1936, when Iowa State’s Athletic Board Chairman had reported to an advertising agency that the Conference’s faculty representatives were not opposed to sponsored broadcasts.399 In September, Yale shook up intercollegiate athletics with the announcement that it had sold its broadcast rights exclusively to the Atlantic Refining Company for a princely $20,000. Other institutions followed suit, although none apparently for the sum that Yale was getting.

It is not clear whether Ohio State’s Athletic Board members were aware of these commercial arrangements at the time that they revamped their own approach to broadcasting. Morrill, however, may have been influenced to some extent by Minnesota’s President Coffman who had urged his fellow conference members to stick with their own non-commercial stations. When Broadcasting Magazine erroneously reported that Dodge dealers in the Twin Cities were sponsoring Minnesota games on a commercial station in St. Paul, Morrill was irritated. He asked St. John to find out what had caused Minnesota to renege on its decision to forego sponsorship. To another faculty member Morrill complained, “I rather question whether we would have been quite as straight laced as we decided to be this fall, and I feel sort of let down by the Minnesota change of front.”400

Ohio State’s new policy shielded it from the inevitable criticism that followed the sale of collegiate broadcast rights, but it did not solve the broadcast issue as far as Morrill and St. John were concerned. The athletic department was besieged with requests from stations and networks for special exemptions that would allow commercial stations to carry the games with

sponsorship. 401 Typical of the University’s response was Higgy’s reply to CBS announcer Ted Husing who had sought permission to carry the Pitt-Ohio State game: “We have had many requests from outside broadcasting stations and networks….If we were to grant these requests we would be confronted with an impossible situation in providing space and facilities.” 402

The Athletic Department also heard from angry alumni around the country. The alumni magazine attempted to explain the philosophical dilemma: “At the heart of the situation is this question: Is it proper, with the charges already heard on many sides that college football is too commercialized, for a University to permit its games to be used in advertising commercial products, even though such an arrangement may be to the financial advantage of the school?” 403 The article reminded alumni that every station and chain in the country was welcome to carry the games on a sustaining basis. But that distinction was lost on listeners who blamed the University and believed that it refused to allow commercial stations to carry the games. “Others, besides myself who can’t get WOSU [and] must wait for quarter scores” felt penalized, according to an OSU graduate in New York who was not able to listen to the Ohio State-NYU game. “We don’t approve of the University policy in broadcasting football games.” 404 The growing indignation of fans was matched by the impatience of St. John. When two alumni cabled him to say: “Cut out asinine broadcasting policy. Give alumni a break,” 405 he responded, “Your premature not to say

401 Ohio State did make one exception. At the request of Michigan’s Athletic Director Fielding Yost, a Detroit station was permitted to put on a sponsored broadcast for which the University of Michigan was paid. However, St. John made clear to Yost that the exception was merely payback for a similar favor the previous year when Michigan had allowed the Ohio Oil company to broadcast a game in Ann Arbor. He added, “As a matter of policy, I do not believe that any institution has a right to sell a sponsored broadcast for games away from home.” See: Lynn W. St. John to Fielding Yost, 8 July 1937. James Lewis Morrill Papers, RG 3/f-2/2, Athletics: 1934-1938, TOSUA.


rather immature wire received,” before informing them that the Mutual Network had indeed agreed to carry that game on a sustaining basis.406 As frustration mounted on all sides, Ohio State made yet another U-turn, devising a third broadcast policy in as many years.

Sponsorship for All

In 1937, Ohio State once again made football broadcasts available to any interested station. This time, however, individual stations were permitted to have program sponsors. Only the networks were required to operate on a sustaining basis. Under the new policy, broadcasters were required to pay a privilege fee that was one and three-tenths times the one-time, daytime hourly rate of the station carrying the game.407 WOSU continued to carry a non-commercial broadcast. Revenue from the broadcast fees paid for WOSU’s telephone lines and travel expenses for away games as well as a $500 remodeling of the press box.408 Furthermore, game rights were not exclusive. Eight Ohio stations contracted for the full season. NBC contracted for two games and CBS for one. To the press, Morrill emphasized that the policy had not been designed to make money. “The angle of revenue was secondary, he said. “Our principal aim was and is to keep all radio stations satisfied.”409 Given the headaches of the two previous seasons, that was no doubt true even though the University stood to make a small profit. Even so, Coffman’s pleas may not have fallen on deaf ears. Summing up the policy for an Athletic Board report, Morrill wrote, “The plan yields to the Athletic Board an annual revenue of $5,000 to $7,500, of which a considerable

sum is reallocated to WOSU to enable the University Station to broadcast football and basketball games away from home, thereby strengthening the program resources of the University station.”

This may have been the last concession to the idea that football broadcasts had an educational worth that warranted broadcasting as a public service. Yet, the public relations value was clearly more important to the Administration. At the end of the season, Morrill reported back to the Athletic Board with obvious satisfaction, “I have an impression that perhaps no single University in America had so many radio listeners last fall as did Ohio State.”

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Chapter 4
Wisconsin

I have grown weary of hearing repetitions of the remark that educators are dull people whose only radio effort consists of dull lectures….And I have no doubt that our commercial colleagues tire of being told that their efforts are governed entirely by the profit motive and that much of their advertising continuity is of doubtful accuracy. 411

H.L. Ewbank
1925

A long tradition of progressivism in Wisconsin helped to preempt the debate on the commercialization of college football that occurred at Ohio State. Arising from the populist movement of Midwestern farmers, Wisconsin’s progressives had faith in the authority and ability of government to manage the increasing complexities of modern public life. They viewed government bureaucracy as a necessary counterbalance to powerful corporations that might otherwise strangle the efforts of individual farmers and businessmen. In terms of radio, this attitude toward the role of government accommodated the use of tax dollars to support the campus station which was therefore obliged to provide citizens with campus offerings including athletic broadcasts. Amid the fiscal failures of the 1930s, the state government remained a cooperative partner. In the depths of the Depression when many universities abandoned their experiments with radio, Wisconsin’s state government not only came to the rescue of WHA but increased its funding. Unlike at Ohio State, there is little evidence at Wisconsin of discussion between the athletic department and the radio station on the broadcast issue. However, it may be the case that the athletic department (whose archival records are not very complete compared to WHA’s) negotiated its own deals with commercial stations. Otherwise, this study found no cause for concern regarding sports broadcasting among the administrators, coaches, or the athletic

411 H.L Ewbank to Herbert L. Pettey, 11 April 1935. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-5, Box 2, Folder 019, Steenbock Library.
director despite a steep decline in gate receipts during the Depression.412 From its first year of broadcasting, WHA carried athletic programming to wide acclaim from listeners. But the University also allowed commercial operators to carry Badger sports on their own stations—at first on a sustaining basis. By the late 1930s, a commercial station could pay a modest fee to WHA to carry a sponsored broadcast. No matter how many stations carried sponsored accounts of the game each week, WHA continued to provide commercial-free coverage. Although the station did not permit advertising on its own air, it carried public service announcements for the Agriculture Department which in turn, picked up some of the expense of producing football broadcasts. It was well worth the expense for the Agriculture Department, because the popularity of Badger football guaranteed a good audience for its messages.

In the tradition of agricultural extension, radio at Wisconsin was seen as a vehicle for the promotion of scientific research and market information that would make farms more productive, efficient, and profitable. Yet, the educational and instructional offerings were matched by programs that aimed to ease the isolation of rural life and bring farm communities into the nation’s cultural and social mainstream. This goal was perhaps best expressed by Wisconsin’s head of extension and WHA’s first radio director W.H. Lighty, who observed that “the farmer, after all, is a man like any other man, and his interests are not solely economic. His interests are broad and human.”413 Therefore, according to Lighty, farmers needed more than instructional programs. “What the isolated country dweller needs most and society on the whole needs most is a share in the culture and the life enriching resources of the race.”414 Under this philosophy,

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412 For example, football receipts for the 1931 season were about $72,000 below the pre-season estimate. The discrepancy forced the athletic council to shave more than $73,000 from its 1931-32 budget, with an additional $54,000 cut in the proposed 1932-33 budget. See: "Solving the University's Financial Crisis," Wisconsin Alumni Magazine, Vol.33, No.3, December, 1931, p.97.

413 W.H. Lighty to Earle C. Reeves, 14 May 1925. William Lighty Papers, Box 22, Correspondence: May, 1925, WSHS.

414 W.H. Lighty to B.C. Riley, November 1924. William Lighty Papers, Box 20, Folder: Correspondence, 1924, WSHS.
football, which was one of the most popular extracurricular programs of the college or university, found a place on WHA’s broadcast schedule and never left.

Radio and the “Wisconsin Idea”

Educational radio at the University of Wisconsin was shaped by the “Wisconsin Idea”—a concept with political, social, and cultural dimensions that can be broadly defined as the belief that the land-grant institution’s resources should be made available to all the citizens of the state.415 It was exemplified by people such as Stephen M. Babcock, a researcher in the agriculture college who refused to patent his butterfat test for milk. He believed the test was so important to the welfare of the community that its free and widespread use outweighed institutional profit or personal gain.416 University President Charles Van Hise is commonly credited with defining the “Wisconsin Idea” in 1906 when he proclaimed that the campus borders were the state borders and added, “I shall never rest content until the beneficent influence of the University of Wisconsin shall be available in every home in the state.”417 The notion that the University had the resources and expertise to serve all the citizens in the state was rooted in the agrarian populists’ suspicion of big business and bound up in the Progressives’ faith in the legislative process to defend the individual from monopolistic tyranny. Wisconsin graduate Robert La Follette, who served two terms as Governor of Wisconsin before moving to the U.S. Senate for almost 20 years, perhaps did more than anyone to create a climate of cooperation between the University and government. As his biographer David P. Thelen noted, La Follette “rejected large-scale corporation as an illegitimate product of greed and special privilege,” and he was determined to redistribute power

417 Ibid.
and wealth. He routinely sought the help of University experts in economics, agriculture, and engineering to help him craft reforms such as the nation’s first worker’s compensation system.\footnote{David P. Thelen, \textit{Robert La Follette and the Insurgent Spirit} (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1976), p.99.}

Even after the First World War, when the brand of progressivism represented by La Follette declined, his influence lingered. Officials in both the University and the state government—located just several blocks apart on opposite ends of State Street in Madison—continued to share a belief in the capacity of government to provide a counterweight to corporate interests. Support for educational radio was a logical extension of that belief.

Physics professor Earle M. Terry was among the first at Wisconsin to grasp the enormous significance of radio. It was the apparatus that could match the rhetoric of the “Wisconsin Idea” with the reality of a geographically large and mostly rural state. Unlike some faculty members, who considered applied research to be beneath the stature of “pure” scientists, Terry appreciated that his work had practical value for the people of Wisconsin.\footnote{John S. Penn, who began studying the history of radio at Wisconsin in the 1950s, found that most of Terry’s senior colleagues in the Physics department considered radio to be a gimmick that was not a legitimate field for study. According to Penn, they failed to see the social significance of radio and routinely complained to the administration that Terry’s radio work interfered with their projects. For a full account of Terry’s role in the development of radio at Wisconsin, see Penn’s article, “Earle Melvin Terry: Father of Educational Radio,” \textit{Wisconsin Magazine of History}, Summer, 1961, pp. 252-256.}

\footnote{According to the Commerce Department’s system of call letter designations, “9” referred to the ninth geographic region represented by the north central United States. “X” stood for experimental and “M” was for Madison. 9XM was originally licensed to Edward Bennett, a colleague of Terry’s, who had secured the license in 1914 for an amateur wireless set he had constructed. According to Davidson, the license was transferred to the university in 1915.}

In 1915, he constructed the University’s first wireless telegraphy station, licensed by the Department of Commerce as 9XM.\footnote{According to the Commerce Department’s system of call letter designations, “9” referred to the ninth geographic region represented by the north central United States. “X” stood for experimental and “M” was for Madison. 9XM was originally licensed to Edward Bennett, a colleague of Terry’s, who had secured the license in 1914 for an amateur wireless set he had constructed. According to Davidson, the license was transferred to the university in 1915.} From the outset, Terry believed that radio should collaborate with the government in disseminating information that would benefit the citizenry. To that end, the first regularly scheduled telegraphic broadcasts on 9XM, commonly cited as having begun on
December 4, 1916, were daily weather reports, provided by the Madison office of the U.S. Weather Bureau.  

Programming expanded quickly, and sporting events were right on the heels of weather updates. In 1917, 9XM carried a wireless telegraphic account of the Wisconsin-Ohio State basketball game. According to Randall Davidson, whose book 9XM Talking chronicles the early history of radio at Wisconsin, the game coverage included an attempt at play-by-play and a post-game recap that was written by a reporter for the student newspaper, the Daily Cardinal. Of course, these reports were relayed in the dots and dashes of Morse Code, but telephonic broadcasts were not far behind. In fact, according to a history written by Harold Engel, who became the station’s second full-time employee in 1932, as early as February of 1919, many amateur operators who were listening for telegraphic signals “were astounded to hear music coming through their headphones.”

Upon the U.S. entry into World War I, almost all wireless operations in the country were forced to shut down by order of President Woodrow Wilson. At Wisconsin, however, Terry had been given permission to continue his radio research, partly because of its applications to submarine communications. The continuity of research at Wisconsin helped to jumpstart telephonic broadcasting there in the immediate post-war years. According to U.S. Weather Bureau records, in 1921, 9XM became the first station in the country to begin voice broadcasts of

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421 Eric R. Miller to U.S. Weather Bureau at Milwaukee, 16 December 1916. WHA Radio and Television 41/06/02, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Steenbock Library. Frost cites 1915 as the first weather report, however, the Miller letter, which cites the later date, is more likely to be accurate as it was written at the time in question.


Later that year, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture and Markets sponsored farm reports on 9XM, paying the station $50 a month for the service. Also, a telephone cable was laid in the underground heating tunnels that connected the station to the University Armory—the site of concerts, basketball games, and convocations and graduation ceremonies.

**Sports Broadcasting**

Athletic events proved to be among 9XM’s most popular programs. In keeping with the “Wisconsin Idea,” Terry considered anything that took place on campus to be fair game for the radio station. For his purposes, athletics served a dual public relations role. First, they attracted listeners to the station who consequently became aware of the service and, Terry hoped, might even tune in for lectures or other entertainment. In addition, grateful sports fans were sometimes sufficiently motivated to contact the station with their thanks or suggestions. Fan letters and postcards provided Terry with concrete evidence of a listening audience and the basis of early audience research. This became important after the First Radio Conference in 1922. That year, the Commerce Department awarded Wisconsin, along with Minnesota, the first two licenses designated for educational broadcasters. Wisconsin was assigned to a frequency and issued new call letters—WHA—which meant that the station was no longer in the experimental category. In seeking renewal of the license later that year, Terry wrote to the Commerce Department that he needed a suitable wave length “for the purpose of communicating with a chain of college stations for the purpose of exchanging athletic scores, news and other official

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A year later, Terry sought to upgrade the license to a Class B status which would qualify Wisconsin for the new wave length that the government had recently set aside for radio. In his application, Terry noted that WHA had successfully demonstrated “the educational and utilitarian value of its broadcasting service” in part by airing “important athletic games, broadcasted [sic] directly from the gymnasium floor or from the athletic field.”

In response, the Commerce Department’s Supervisor of Radio told Terry that his application would be judged on the quality and continuity of service to the general public. The criterion for broadcasting stations, the supervisor noted, “may be considered as set by the larger and more progressive stations in the country,” by which he meant the commercial stations that had begun to sense the potentially lucrative aspects of radio. In a foreshadowing of the arguments that government regulators would use against educational broadcasters in the decade to come, he added:

> It seems the educational value of a University Station and other material broadcasted from colleges and universities have not received the response from the general public that this office personally believes should be of exceptional value to the public. After extensive check of the results of such broadcasting, it seems that the reaction of the public is entirely negligible.

In a follow-up letter, Terry appeared to downplay the significance of sporting events. He noted that the station’s broadcasts consisted of “educational lectures, agricultural reports, news, athletic contests, etc…” which “are considered of value to a large portion of the population of Wisconsin.” However, he did not cite the correspondence he had received from sports fans even after learning that the quantity of feedback would be interpreted by the Commerce Department as proof of public service. Had he chosen to reference the letters from those listeners,
he would have had many positive—even gushing—sentiments to report. WHA had aired play-by-play accounts of five basketball games from the University Armory in 1923. Letters and postcards, preserved in the station’s files, had flooded into the station after each game. Dozens of responses were elicited by the Wisconsin-Purdue game alone which was won by Wisconsin in the closing seconds of the game. One alumnus wrote, “The yelling and cheering by the crowd almost made it seem as though I were once more in the old gym seeing the team once more myself.”

From Sioux City, Iowa, another fan wrote that “your radio audience also ‘sat on edge of seats’ ‘till the final score sounded.” The reach of the broadcast and the public relations value were apparent in a message from a listener in Conway, Arkansas: “We have become enthusiastic fans and rooters for the University of Wisconsin basketball team...[We] could hardly keep our seats as the game progressed. It was the biggest ‘thriller’ we have had since entering the radio family a year ago.” And apparently, enjoyment of the broadcast did not depend on a particular attachment to the University:

I sat on the edge of my chair before a loud speaker, eleven miles from a railroad in a little Kansas oil field camp....although neutral as a former Illinois student, I enjoyed the game just as completely as if I had been a rabid partisan. It certainly seemed good to hear the howling mob at a basketball game again. The roar of the crowd, of course, beat the announcer to the news of Wisconsin baskets....thanks for a little touch of the Big Ten Spirit.

Terry’s failure to cite the proof that the Commerce Department found lacking follows a pattern that existed at other state-supported universities. Although athletics were generally the most popular programming on university-licensed stations, those stations chose to highlight their academic or informational offerings in the early jockeying for channels. As intercollegiate
athletics were increasingly picked up by commercial broadcasters they became less meaningful as an example of programming that only educational stations could or would provide.\footnote{Although the archival evidence favors sports as the most reliably popular programming in the early 1920s, other programs also elicited large volumes of fan mail, notably, live concerts on the Madison campus in 1922 and 1923 by cellist Pablo Casals.}

Although Terry chose not to underline the popularity of sports broadcasts, he clearly supported the coverage of athletics on WHA. Evidence that he considered athletics a worthy endeavor for extension can be found in a letter he wrote to a Board of Regents member in 1923. The regent had informed Terry that a service organization was scouting a site for an orphanage it planned to build and was interested in the advantages of locating its facility within the listening range of a radio station that could provide “the advantages of lectures and other entertainments.”\footnote{B.F. Faast to Earle M. Terry, 17 March 1923. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 Box 1, General Correspondence, Folder 003: E-H, Steenbock Library.}

In reply, Terry noted:

\begin{quote}
We have circuits in the tunnels which connect four of the largest university auditoriums to the radio station and have broadcasted quite a number of the important addresses and concerts given during the past year. The basket ball games were reported direct from the gymnasium and it was possible for the listeners to hear the cheering and songs at the games. We plan to have a special line connecting with the football field next fall and broadcast the games there in the same manner. We thoroughly believe in the effectiveness of radio for extension work and feel that it would have a decidedly good effect upon the children in such a school as you describe.\end{quote}\footnote{Earle M. Terry to B.F. Faast, 6 April 1923. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 003: E-H, Steenbock Library.}

Further, some of Terry’s most heated confrontations with the FRC later in the decade centered on his determination to make Badger sports available to as wide an audience as possible.

In the post-war years, a former student of Terry’s initiated the first attempt at an intercollegiate radio report. C.M. Jansky, Jr., who would later assist WHA in its struggle against commercial operators, was working in the engineering department of the University of Minnesota when he contacted his old professor in 1920. He said that his station planned to send out play-by-play football returns for the Minnesota-Wisconsin game, and he invited Terry’s operators to listen...
in and reply. This was undoubtedly a telegraphic report as Jansky noted that his goal was to reach the greatest number of amateurs, but a year later, Minnesota would be airing telephonic broadcasts by having students relay game updates from the sidelines to the radio studio.  

Equipment problems delayed the first scheduled voice broadcast of a Badger football game by a year, when the home opener against Coe College was carried. In letters to the station, listeners thanked WHA for the broadcasts, but they were also critical of the quality. They expressed dismay at the blurring of the audio, the frequent breaks for station identification, and the announcer’s tendency to use players’ numbers rather than names. In the homecoming game with Minnesota, the announcer drew the ire of some audience members because his “choice of language would not be considered entirely proper should there be ladies listening to these games,” according to one disgruntled listener. That criticism was seconded by an alumnus who wrote, “The man doing the transmitting from the field should be reminded that his somewhat profane and at times obscene language was just as audible to the radio listeners as it was to his associates for who it was intended.” For Terry, who worked hard to perfect the technical aspects of football broadcasting, such lapses in content quality must have been frustrating. Although he did not pretend to compete with commercial broadcasters, he believed the University’s radio productions should be just as polished and beyond reproach, even while operating on a bare bones budget.

Over the next two years, play-by-play coverage improved to judge from the largely complimentary tone of letters from listeners. The airwaves, meanwhile, grew ever more

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440 J.M. McBride to WHA Radio, 25 October 1923. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Box 1: Folder 012 Listeners, 1921-1923, Steenbock Library. This particular listener also compared WHA’s broadcast unfavorably to Chicago’s KYW the previous year, although it is not clear whether KYW was carrying Wisconsin football or another school.
441 A.A. Lundgren to University of Wisconsin, 8 November 1923. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02 Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929: Folder 009 Listeners, 1922-1923, Steenbock.
442 J.E. Miller to WHA, 29 October 1923. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02 General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Box 1, Folder 009 Listeners, 1922-1923, Steenbock Library.
crowded. The government’s solution—divided airtime—took a greater toll on WHA’s athletic broadcasts than on any other genre of programming because they were scheduled irregularly and could not simply be shifted to a more convenient time slot. But before Terry could make sports broadcasts feasible, he and his colleagues had to insure the financial footing of the station itself.

The decisions they would make in the late-1920s would cement the station’s affiliation with the state government and embed Badger sports into the fabric of the “Wisconsin Idea.”

Developing a Foundation

Unlike at Ohio State, where radio developed as its own department of the University, WHA initially remained part of the physics department, operating out of the basement of Sterling Hall, one of the main science buildings on campus. Its operating funds likewise had come from the physics department budget—a coup of sorts for Terry since the department was lukewarm on his radio project. With the advent of regular broadcasting, Terry believed that the station had become an asset to the entire university and should no longer be the fiscal responsibility of the physics department alone. In 1923, the Board of Regents provided almost half of the station’s annual operating expenses while the other half came from Terry’s departmental budget. In a letter to the University’s business manager, Terry requested additional University funds both to operate the station and to buy a motor generator. He reminded the business manager that because the generator powering the station belonged to the physics department, it was unavailable for general research during the twice daily broadcasts. By 1926, WHA was a line item in the University budget. The Board of Regents steadily increased its appropriations to WHA—allowing

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444 Earle M. Terry to E.A. Birge, 26 March 1923. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 002: A-D, Steenbock Library.
445 Earle M. Terry to J.D. Phillips, 16 April 1923. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 012 Steenbock Library.
for improvements to the studio, remote locations, transmitter, and other equipment—until 1931 when the state legislature took over the funding responsibilities. Even then, when the Depression prompted retrenchments in most state departments, expenditures on radio continued to increase, an indication of the importance the state government attached to having a vehicle for educational and informational programming that was not beholden to commercial interests.⁴⁴⁶

Steady funding promoted a diversity of content including lectures, home and farm shows, concerts, and athletics. As early as 1922, a radio committee of 12 faculty members had begun to study the best uses of radio and to steer the development of programs to meet the identified needs. Along with Terry, the early leaders included W.H. Lighty, who was the University’s first Director of Extension Services. Lighty served the station as a program director and unofficially as a director of promotions and public relations. Also contributing to programming was Andrew W. Hopkins, a professor and journalist in the College of Agriculture, who understood the significance of radio to the sparsely populated farm communities of rural Wisconsin. Along with Terry and Henry L. Ewbank, a speech professor who would later serve on the three-member executive council of the University Radio Committee, these men would guide WHA through the first stage of its development in the 1920s.⁴⁴⁷

**Commercial Offers**

The distinction between funding from private versus government sources was established soon after the creation of WHA when Terry was approached by the *Milwaukee Journal* with a tempting offer. The newspaper would contribute at least $5,000 to boost the station’s power to a capacity sufficient to reach the entire state. For a two-year period, the newspaper would also pay

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⁴⁴⁶ Administration and Financing of Radio Station WHA, 1938. Harold B. McCarty Papers, Box 14, M87-133, WSHS.
for basic maintenance and the salary of an operator. Upon expiration of the two-year contract, WHA would maintain the rights to any capital improvements or equipment purchases made with Journal funding. In exchange for the newspaper’s largesse, the station would air programming at least three times a week prepared by the Journal—a service that would be promoted as an exclusive partnership of the University and the Milwaukee Journal. The implication was that WHA would not be permitted to air material from other newspapers. Terry presented the proposal to Wisconsin’s president who discussed it with the Board of Regents. Terry reported back to the Journal’s publisher that “since the university is a state institution and its facilities must, accordingly, be available to all citizens of the state without discrimination, it is hardly at liberty to accept funds from any group of individuals to enter upon any agreement whereby a particular group may secure privileges not available to the citizens of the state at large.” Terry added that the proposal might have been successful had WHA remained free under the agreement to broadcast material from other newspapers. “I assume, however, that exclusiveness is one of the features which makes [sic] the proposition of value to you.”

The principle of giving favored treatment to nobody, established in these early dealings with the Milwaukee Journal, set Wisconsin apart from other universities that could not resist commercial enticements. It also saved Wisconsin from the angst that Ohio State would suffer a decade later in its dilemma over an exclusivity agreement with one radio station. Lighty and Hopkins shared Terry’s commitment to the principle of non-commercialism. When representatives of the Sears, Roebuck and Company contacted Hopkins’s boss, the dean of the

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448 Earle M. Terry to Edward A. Birge, 2 February 1922. WHA Radio and Television 41/06/02-4/005, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 002: A-D, Steenbock Library.
449 Earle M. Terry to H.J. Grant, 8 February 1922. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 Box 1, General Correspondence, Folder 003: E-H, Steenbock Library.
College of Agriculture, with an offer to partner with the station they were building in Chicago, Lighty, Hopkins, and Terry vetoed the proposal despite the dean’s interest.450

The following year, Wisconsin’s Business Manager for Athletics, George Levis, conveyed to the University Radio Committee a request from the Chicago Tribune Company to have exclusive broadcast rights to the Michigan-Wisconsin game that would be played in Madison that fall. Levis wrote, “It is my understanding that you have always broadcasted our games and I do not want to take any steps that would infringe upon your right to do so, in the advent [sic] you are planning on this game.”451 The station’s chief operator asked Levis to reject the Tribune’s offer, which the business manager promptly did.452

The decision by the radio committee to avoid commercialization of WHA took place within a wider campus debate on the “capitalistic encroachment upon the educational field.”453

In 1925, the Board of Regents approved a policy of rejecting all gifts from educational foundations. What triggered the new policy was a $12,500 contribution that funded a study on a cure for syphilis. The gift had come from the General Education Board which was endowed by John D. Rockefeller. Although no strings were attached to the contribution, the Regents feared that such donations posed a potential threat to academic freedom. Defending the policy in the Wisconsin Alumni Magazine, Isabel Bacon La Follette claimed that “Rockefeller influence and similar influences of organized wealth have deprived us of free speech and free press” and now planned to move into education. La Follette quoted Regent Zona Gale’s summary of the board’s opposition to such philanthropy: “That for State educational institutions to look to the monopoly system for any part of their support is consonant neither with the free public-school ideas, nor

450 John Stanley Penn, "The Origin and Development of Radio Broadcasting at the University of Wisconsin to 1940." PhD diss, University of Wisconsin, 1940, p. 270.
451 George W. Levis to Broadcasting Station, 17 July 1925. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929: Folder 007, Steenbock Library.
452 Harold B. McCarty to George W. Levis, 20 July 1925. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 2, General Correspondence: Folder 007, Steenbock Library.
with the democratic ideal.” Despite sometimes rancorous debates over the next few years, the Regents would hold fast to their refusal to accept gifts from educational foundations—at least until the Depression set in. Their reluctance to offer corporations a route into the University may have carried over into radio because their financial commitment to WHA never wavered.

Co-existing with Commercial Radio

As an invited and active participant in the Third and Fourth Radio Conferences, Terry understood the forces arrayed against educational broadcasters. Even as the University Radio Committee was honing the non-commercial principles that would guide the station, Terry was mindful of the marketplace model that seemed poised to consume non-profit stations. When he inquired about the programming available on WREO in Lansing, Michigan, a station owned by the REO Motor Car Company, Terry got a polite reply from the advertising manager who appeared to seize the opportunity to deliver a lecture to the director of an educational radio station:

Like every other American institution, the Radio Broadcasting Station is a product of public opinion—a reflection of popular desire. A Broadcasting Station, if it is to perform a service to humanity, must supply what its unseen audience desires—not what its sponsors believe proper. The only barometer of public opinion is the Station mail, and it is with a deep feeling of gratitude that we watch the volume of that mail increase.

454 Isabel Bacon La Follette, "Why a State-Supported University," *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, Vol.27, No. 2, December 12, 1925. La Follette was the daughter-in-law of Robert and the wife of the future governor of Wisconsin, Philip La Follette who at the time, was the District Attorney for Dane County. Mrs. La Follette was a social activist in her own right, and she supported Gale’s campaign to defend the new policy from detractors. Zona Gale was not only a regent, but a well-known playwright, novelist, and short-story writer who in 1921 became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for drama. See [http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/topics/gale/](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/topics/gale/).

455 Either Terry or his student C.M. Jansky, Jr. participated in each of the four national radio conferences where they were among the few representatives of educational broadcasting.

456 H.T. Deherd to Earle M. Terry, 28 November 1924. WHA Radio and Television 41/06/02, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 005: 1916-1924, Steenbock Library.
Although Terry assuredly took pride in bulky sacks of mail, he resisted the temptation to use mail volume as the standard by which he measured WHA’s programming. He described his own yardstick in response to a listener request for less classical music on WHA: “The one test that we must apply is that our programs shall possess educational value. The air is overcrowded every night with jazz and other worthless material, and it would be quite beneath the dignity of the University to add to it.”

In one notable effort at innovative and interactive programming, WHA carried an intercollegiate debate and invited audience members to choose the winner by sending their votes by mail to the station. Despite such alternative programming, WHA found it more and more difficult to be heard amid the clash of competing signals in the mid-1920s. The station often changed frequencies in an effort to find clear air, making it difficult for its regular listeners to find the signal. Although the Commerce Department had made new bandwidth available following the Second Radio Conference in 1923, that space quickly proved to be insufficient for the number of broadcasters seeking airwaves.

By 1924, WHA found itself on one of the new frequencies provided by the Commerce Department. However, the frequency was also occupied by KYW, a powerful Westinghouse station in Chicago. In an effort to suggest an equitable time-sharing arrangement, Terry sent an introductory letter to KYW’s director offering the Chicago station a greater share of the available time to reflect its heavier schedule. He requested that WHA take Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings from 7:30 to 9 p.m. (Mondays were already “silent” in Chicago, a night when

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457 Earle M. Terry to C.H. Alsmeyer, 25 February 1925. WHA Radio and Television 41/06/02, Box 1, General Correspondence, Folder 012: General Business, Radio Operations 1925-1928, Steenbock Library. Ironically, when a WHA staff member invited a local pianist for an unscheduled performance in December of 1925, a stunned Terry found four sacks of fan mail the next day requesting more “jazz.” See: John Stanley Penn Papers, 1922-53, WSHS, particularly, Eric Miller to Penn, May 27, 1950.


stations did not broadcast in order to allow ham operators to ply the airwaves.) He also asked for airtime for the only two basketball games that season that were scheduled to be played on KYW’s nights. And he noted his intention to broadcast home football games in the fall. “I think that if you can arrange to allow us these hours, that the rest of the time can be yours as far as we are concerned.”

The time-sharing arrangement appeared to work moderately well for the next six months or so. Terry was particularly grateful to KYW for accommodating Wisconsin sporting events. In a note of thanks for permitting the broadcast of the 1925 Wisconsin-Michigan basketball game on KYW’s time, Terry wrote, “Judging from the number of reports received from our listeners, basketball games are the most popular broadcasts that we make.” Terry appeared to believe that his relations with KYW were cordial and their time-sharing agreement was acceptable to both sides. With the arrival of the 1925 football season, however, it became clear that KYW would not go silent for Badger football broadcasts as Terry had hoped because it would be carrying the University of Chicago games at the same time and on the same frequency. In effect, that meant that Wisconsin could not carry its own home football games. The news was conveyed to Terry in a letter from Westinghouse’s chief of radio operations in Pittsburgh, C.W. Horn. Not only did Horn refuse to accommodate Terry’s request for airtime on football Saturdays, he essentially refused to acknowledge WHA’s right to any airtime. “We do not believe Station KYW should be compelled to split time in view of its importance, its location, the availability of talent, etc.,” Horn wrote. He may have relented a bit—perhaps after having spoken with Terry in person at the Fourth National Radio Conference—because ten days later, Terry sent him a letter in reply to a telegram, thanking him for his “fair-mindedness” in the time division matter.

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460 Earle M. Terry to W.C. Evans, 12 January 1924, WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 003: E-H, Steenbock Library.
461 Earle M. Terry to W.S. Evans, 27 February 1925. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 003: E-H, Steenbock Library.
462 C.W. Horn to Earle M. Terry, 25 September 1925. WHA Radio and Television 41/06/02, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 011, Steenbock Library.
Nonetheless, Terry added, KYW’s attitude “can hardly be considered as satisfactory to us inasmuch as it acknowledges no rights on our part to any broadcasting time, but merely permits us to operate by your permission.”463 Whatever slight concession Terry may have won was soon lost, however. Within days of his correspondence with the Westinghouse officer, Terry received a letter from KYW’s director Wilson Wetherbee, informing him that KYW could not relinquish any time because it also had football games to broadcast: “We have rendered a service to the public, which we know to be well appreciated, especially by the thousands of football fans, who reside within the radius of our station. We cannot, therefore, disappoint these people, who are expecting service from us.”464

Facing the prospect of disappointing his own listeners, Terry took his case to the Commerce Department. He enclosed copies of his correspondence with KYW and outlined his dilemma to the radio supervisor:

The university has gone to considerable expense to construct a special broadcasting booth and install lines connecting the stadium with the station. KYW flatly refuses to allow us any time for this purpose. The first game occurs this afternoon, and we are unable to broadcast it. We have three more home games, two of particular importance, and it entails a great hardship on ourselves as well as our radio audience not to be able to broadcast them.465

Terry appeared to have anticipated the futility of his appeal. He charged the radio supervisor with failure to take responsibility for enforcing wavelength assignments. With palpable frustration, he concluded, “We are accordingly placed in a very unsatisfactory position in as much as we have no one to whom we can appeal to secure justice in the matter.”466

463 Earle M. Terry to C.W. Horn, 8 October 1925. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 014, Steenbock Library.
464 Wilson Wetherbee to Earle M. Terry, 2 October 1925. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-29, Folder 011, Steenbock Library.
465 Earle M. Terry to E.A. Beane, 2 October 1925. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 Box 1, General Correspondence,1915-192, Folder 001: A-D, Steenbock Library.
466 Ibid.
Terry notified KYW that he had sought intercession from the Commerce Department. While acknowledging KYW’s reluctance to divide time, he asked the station’s management to consider his situation and WHA’s legitimate rights. “As you know, we hold a broadcasting license that is in all respects the equivalent of yours,” he wrote. “We cannot admit that under those circumstances the Westinghouse Company can maintain that it is entitled to the entire use of the time.”\textsuperscript{467} Since KYW had forced the elimination of Wisconsin’s own football broadcasts, Terry requested that the larger station at least air the Badgers’ homecoming game with Michigan and the Purdue game by remote control. He noted that both games were “of as much general interest as any that will occur this season.”\textsuperscript{468} Terry soon had his answer. KYW’s chief insisted that “the extensive service which we now own makes it impossible for us to divide time without disorganizing our schedules.” Had KYW not been busy with its own games at Stagg Field, he said, the station would have been happy to carry Wisconsin’s homecoming game with Michigan by remote control. Adding insult to injury, Wetherbee also informed Terry that KYW would no longer make special provisions for Badger basketball.\textsuperscript{469}

Terry once again vented to Radio Supervisor E.A. Beane:

\begin{quote}
We have been unable this year to broadcast any of our football games. We feel that KYW’s attitude in this respect is particularly unfair, inasmuch as he has broadcasted only the games played at Stagg Field, and I believe that on each occasion there have been one or more stations broadcasting these games simultaneously. On the occasion of our Homecoming Game, which was of particular importance to us, KYW was one of four stations to broadcast the game at Chicago.\textsuperscript{470}
\end{quote}

Beane apparently did nothing to intervene. As the 1926 basketball season arrived, Terry once again had to plead for airtime, noting that the Athletic Department was eager to broadcast the

\textsuperscript{467} Earle M. Terry to Wilson Wetherbee, 8 October 1925. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 014, Steenbock Library.

\textsuperscript{468} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{469} Wilson Wetherbee to E.M. Terry, 12 October 1925. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 011, Steenbock Library.

\textsuperscript{470} Earle M. Terry to E.A. Beane, 1 December 1925. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 001, Steenbock Library.
games and that the station was besieged with inquiries from alumni and others. “If will be a very
great hardship for us if we cannot broadcast all of these games,” Terry wrote to KYW’s chief
engineer. But the arrangement with KYW continued to deteriorate over the following year. In
the intervening months, NBC had been created as a subsidiary that would unify all the broadcast
activities of RCA, and the Chicago station became part of the “blue” chain of stations. In order to
provide the full slate of sponsored network programs, KYW wanted WHA’s Monday,
Wednesday and Friday nights.

WHA’s troubled relationship with KYW had a ripple effect throughout the station.
Without the ability to broadcast its sports programming regularly, the station lost much of the
prestige it had acquired from athletics. Its nighttime broadcasts were marred by interference from
KYW and daytime broadcasts had to be scheduled so as not to interfere with the physics
department’s research. As Davidson noted, many professors who had provided content to WHA
no longer thought it was worth their effort to make on-air presentations given the reduction in
broadcast range, quantity of airtime, and audience size.

WHA’s predicament was alleviated slightly with the establishment of the FRC in 1927.
As previously noted, stations throughout the country were reassigned to new frequencies. WHA
was moved to a frequency and ordered to share time with WLBL, the state-owned station in
Stevens Point. In light of the public service mission that they shared, the idea of forming a state-
supported “chain” or network of stations soon germinated. Before any action could be taken,
however, their frequencies had been changed once again. Over the following year, the FRC
repeatedly moved WHA to new frequencies with orders to share time with multiple other stations,
including at various times, stations owned by the Capital Times and the Milwaukee Journal.

471 Earle M. Terry to W.C. Evans, 6 January 1926. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box
1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 011, Steenbock Library.
472 Randall Davidson, 9XM Talking: WHA Radio and the Wisconsin Idea (Madison: University of
Although live football broadcasting had resumed in the fall of 1927 with “Red” Mich, a sports reporter for the *Wisconsin State Journal*, on the microphone, reception remained spotty. Regular listeners complained that their reception had degenerated since the FRC had taken over. “It seems so the oftener they change the wave length the poorer the reception gets,” one listener complained. “Last night it was impossible to hear anything. We could hear nothing but squeals and howls.”

One problem was that some stations simply ignored their FRC assignments or time limits and blatantly encroached on WHA’s airwaves. With the approach of the 1928 basketball season, a listener griped that WHA’s poor signal would be “a terrible hardship throughout this Winter on your radio audience who are exceptionally desirous of hearing the broadcasting of the basketball games.” He added that recent broadcast attempts had been “absolutely nothing but an aggravation.” The channel shifting proved perhaps most irritating to alumni who had become accustomed to getting sports broadcasts from their alma mater. “Has station WHA gone out of business?” asked one alumnus who wondered why he could tune in stations from all over North America yet fail to find WHA. “Are we cheap skates that we cannot afford an up-to-date, high-powered station in connection with our University?” The station staff could do little but commiserate with the listeners and promise to pursue the matter with the FRC. “Please bear with us,” a station representative wrote to one disappointed sports fan. “We are leaving no stone unturned to get a better wave.”

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473 A.O. Popp to WHA, 22 November 1927. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929: Folder 005, Steenbock Library.
474 Dean R. Williams to WHA, 11 January 1928. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-29: Folder 005, Steenbock Library.
475 B.W. Scott to WHA, 14 February 1928. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-29: Folder 005, Steenbock Library.
476 Radio Station WHA to S.B. Robinson, 13 January 1928. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-29: Folder 005, Steenbock Library.
At no point was the option of abandoning radio discussed. The following undated report which was found in a folder with documents from 1928 indicates an effort to justify to the public exactly what the station was attempting to achieve and how it differed from commercial radio:

The question is sometimes asked, ‘Why does the University continue to broadcast especially since the air is so overcrowded?’ That question can be answered best by the nature of the programs sponsored by WHA. It is the purpose of this station to supply a type of program that cannot be secured from the average commercial station. Some radio listeners do not like jazz at all, while a great many others do not care for jazz all of the time. There are substantial evidences that a number of radio listeners desire something of the education, the cultural and higher class of entertainment mixed in with their ‘radio diet.’ It is not the purpose of the University Broadcasting Station to dictate what people shall listen to over their radios…nor to interfere with the reception which anyone desires to get.477

The report went on to list the four categories of programming available on WHA: “High entertainment,” general information, special information, and University sports.

For a brief time in the fall of 1928, WHA secured a suitable frequency that it was ordered to share with two other non-commercial broadcasters. Terry quickly reached a mutually acceptable agreement with the two stations on the division of time. Then in October, he received a letter from the FRC informing him that two commercial stations, WIBO in Chicago and WNAX in Yankton, South Dakota, had applied for the same frequency. In what came to be the FRC’s modus operandi, Terry was told that a hearing on the matter would be held in Washington just three days later.478 Stunned by the turn of events, Terry appealed to Sam Pickard, the FRC commissioner for Wisconsin’s district.479 He accused the commercial stations of being pirates,

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477 “WHA,” WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-5, Box 15: Folder 023, Steenbock Library.  
478 FRC Commissioner Sam Pickard to E.M. Terry, 22 October 1928. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 001, Steenbock Library.  
479 Philip T. Rosen, The Modern Stentors: Radio Broadcasters and the Federal Government, 1920-1934 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980). Pickard was perceived as the sole commissioner at that time to be friendly toward educators. A former educator himself, Pickard had headed the Radio Division of the Agricultural Department. He was appointed to the FRC in late 1927 after two of the original five commissioners died and another, Bellows, resigned within a two month period in the FRC’s first year of existence. In a 1934 article, a Chicago Tribune reporter disputed Pickard’s sympathies for educational broadcasters, noting that Pickard had resigned from the FRC in 1929 to take a “high salary position” at CBS. See: Arthur Sears Henning, "Radio Chains Seek 'Stand-in' at White House," Chicago Tribune, May 13, 1934, p.1.
and he noted the inequity of receiving just a few days notice of the hearing while the commercial stations had been in Washington for the past three weeks preparing their case with the help of expensive legal counsel. “The charge has repeatedly been made that commercial interests are deliberately trying to crowd educational institutions off the air. Here is a definite, clear case and we appeal to the Federal Radio Commission to prevent it,” Terry wrote. He also used the occasion to note that WHA’s treatment at the hands of the FRC had already been harsh enough that “our work has been all but killed.” Terry pleaded with Pickard not to support yet another unfavorable ruling. “If the Commission feels that our educational programs are not sufficiently in the public interest, convenience and necessity to warrant a few early evening hours…then the University of Wisconsin must, in disgust, quit a field it which it has pioneered since the very inception of radio broadcasting.”

Refused permission by the University administration to attend the hearing in person, Terry relied on the other non-commercial stations—the University of Illinois and the North Shore Congregational Church—to support their common cause. They were not successful. Having been ordered by the FRC to share their time with the commercial stations, the church’s pastor, John C. O’Hair, reported back to Terry that WNAX and WIBO were “very selfish, altogether unreasonable and unjust.”

Although WHA carried football play-by-play in the fall, they were not alone in the broadcast booth. According to the alumni magazine, the Milwaukee Journal’s WTMJ carried all games played at Camp Randall that fall. In addition, WGN, the Chicago Tribune’s station, carried Wisconsin’s home games with Notre Dame and Chicago and featured nationally-known announcer Quinn Ryan at the microphone. The magazine trumpeted the “excellent hook ups”

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480 E.M. Terry to Sam Pickard, 26 October 1928. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929, Folder 001, Steenbock Library.

481 John C. O’Hair to Earle M. Terry, 23 November 1928. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929: Folder 007, Steenbock Library.
that brought the game coverage to those who could not be in attendance. “Other stations are completing arrangements to broadcast the Badger battles also,” the magazine noted.\textsuperscript{482} This raises the question of who exactly was making those arrangements. WHA’s files contain no mention of commercial broadcasts, nor was any reference found in the Board of Regents minutes. The most likely explanation is that the athletic department itself negotiated the deal with other stations.

Evidence of this is suggested by a letter in Terry’s files from 1924. Professor T.E. Jones in the Department of Physical Education sent Terry a copy of a letter from the manager of WGN, the Chicago Tribune’s station. The manager had noted that AT&T planned to charge $676 for the telephone circuits to carry the Wisconsin-Notre Dame game. “We have therefore decided to abandon the idea, particularly in view of the fact that the Chicago-Illinois game will be broadcasted [sic] by Station K-Y-W on the same day and your own station will be broadcasting the Wisconsin-Notre Dame game,” he wrote.\textsuperscript{483}

Terry, meanwhile, struggled to cobble together a time-sharing plan that would enable WHA to continue its popular basketball coverage. The arrangement negotiated among his station, WNAX, and WIBO allotted WHA just 45 minutes on weekdays beginning at noon and from 7-8 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. That was enough for Terry to proceed with the basketball games his listeners clamored for. But Chicago’s WIBO would not agree to requests for extended airtime on game nights. And if anything angered listeners more than no game it was half a game. “Your signals came through weakly and it was with great effort that we were able to get your broadcast at all. Then to our surprise you cut off at 8:15 before the end of the first half. What’s the idea?” wrote one irritated listener.\textsuperscript{484} Amid the criticisms, were occasional plaudits for the station’s basketball coverage from fans in the Madison area that were able to receive a strong

\textsuperscript{482} L.R. Gage, "Broadcast from Field," \textit{Wisconsin Alumni Magazine}, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1928, p.16.
\textsuperscript{483} J.M. Cleary to T.E. Jones (Copy), 25 September 1924. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-1929: Folder 001, Steenbock Library.
\textsuperscript{484} Publisher, \textit{Manitowoc Herald-News} to WHA, 11 December 1928. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-29: Folder 006, Steenbock Library.
signal. One listener urged the station to continue its carriage of home games, adding, “By doing this you are winning more freinds [sic] and the feeling between the towns people and University will be more mutual.” This letter apparently referred to one of two days in late December on which WHA carried basketball broadcasts in their entirety even though that meant dipping into WIBO’s time slot. Almost two months later, a telegram arrived from FRC Secretary Carl Butman informing WHA of the alleged infraction: “Complaint has been made to this Commission that on two recent occasions your station has remained on the air beyond the hour specified in the division of time set forth [in the time-sharing agreement].…If this is true, you have violated the terms of your license. I request that you advise the Commission of the circumstances attending the incident referred to.”

Far more often, however, the situation was the reverse. As KYW had done in 1925, WIBO frequently encroached on WHA’s evening hours in violation of the time-sharing agreement. But Terry’s complaints to the FRC were handled differently than WIBO’s allegations against WHA. While the FRC chastised Terry for staying on the air too long and demanded an explanation, it refused to issue a similar reprimand to WIBO. Rather, the FRC told Terry that the time-sharing arrangement was a private agreement among the concerned parties that did not involve the government. Perhaps emboldened by the FRC’s refusal to intervene, WIBO next began using WHA’s noontime hour. Terry told the FRC that WIBO’s reasoning was that it had already sold advertising for that hour and could not give it up without breaching its contract with the advertisers. Exasperated by the obstacles to broadcasting and the apparent double standard for commercial versus non-profit stations, Terry closed WHA for about a week in late March,

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485 R.F. Volkmann to WHA, 31 December 1928. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 Box 1, General Correspondence, 1915-29: Folder 006, Steenbock Library.
486 Carl H. Butman to WHA, 15 March 1929. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, Federal Government Licenses and Operation, 1916-1929, Steenbock Library.
487 Ibid.
1929. However, he renewed broadcasting on April 2nd when the FRC offered temporary use of a new frequency for daytime only broadcasts. It was at best a pyrrhic victory that rewarded WIBO’s bold grab at WHA’s three hours of evening broadcasts.489

Still, Terry looked for ways to broaden access to WHA’s programs despite its limited airtime. In April, WTMJ began simulcasting WHA’s popular Farm Program three days a week through the use of long-distance telephone lines. This arrangement marked the start of WHA’s policy of allowing other Wisconsin stations to carry its programming—a strategic move that would eventually ensure widespread coverage of many University offerings, including Badger football. As with his earlier offer to have KYW broadcast a Wisconsin football game, the agreement with WTMJ was evidence of Terry’s commitment to public service. He was not searching for sponsors, money, ratings, or credit. He simply wanted to make the University’s resources—whether a farm program or a football game—available at no cost to the citizens of Wisconsin by whatever means possible. It was a tacit demonstration of the “Wisconsin Idea.”

When the station encountered no serious interference at its new assignment, Terry applied to the FRC for permanent use of the frequency. For Terry, it was a painful yet inevitable compromise. Although it gave WHA an unimpeded daytime signal, the station was forced to cede its evening broadcast schedule. That meant the end of basketball broadcasts, one of the station’s most popular programs.

The Frank Era

The year 1929 was one of great change for WHA. Most significantly, Terry died of heart failure at the age of 50, the day after filing for permanent assignment to the new frequency.490 His

489 John Stanley Penn, "The Origin and Development of Radio Broadcasting at the University of Wisconsin to 1940." PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1940. See especially pp. 295-305.
490 Ibid.
replacement as station director was Edward Bennett. A professor of Electrical Engineering, Bennett’s involvement with radio went back to the turn of the century. In 1905-06, Bennett had been on Reginald Fessenden’s staff at Brant Rock, Massachusetts where experimental voice transmissions were first conducted. Speech professor H.L. Ewbank, who had sometimes prepared programming for WHA, also stepped in to help fill the void left by Terry. Along with Andrew Hopkins of the College of Agriculture they comprised the executive committee of the University Radio Committee. Under their watch, WHA hired its first full-time radio director, Harold McCarty. The new leadership took stock of the radio situation and concluded that the station needed either to ramp up its broadcasting efforts or get out of the radio business entirely. That was the ultimatum they delivered to Wisconsin’s President Glenn Frank.491

Frank had assumed the presidency of Wisconsin in 1925. His reputation as a bold reformer was established within a year of his inauguration when he invited a well-known liberal philosopher, Alexander Meiklejohn to establish an “Experimental College” on campus that would be grounded in new democracy-based theories of education.492 “With Dr. Frank and Dr. Meiklejohn, two of the nation’s most liberal educators putting into practice their advanced views on teaching…the University of Wisconsin will become one of the leading laboratories in the nation in educational procedure,” the Capital Times in Madison predicted.493 Frank’s plans to shake up education included the use of radio. To a far greater degree than most university leaders, he supported the campus radio station because he envisioned it playing a major role in both education and public relations. Soon after his arrival on campus, Frank met with faculty to outline

491 H.L. Ewbank to H.B. McCarty, 15 May 1946. Harold B. McCarty Papers, Box 14, M87-133, WSHS.
492 Adam R. Nelson, Education and Democracy: The Meaning of Alexander Meiklejohn, 1872-1964 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001). In particular, see Chapters 5 and 6 which cover Meiklejohn’s Madison years. Nelson also examines Frank’s colorful career before assuming the presidency which included touring the country with athlete-turned-evangelist Billy Sunday, lecturing for the Chautauqua Institute, and serving stints as personal secretary to Boston retail magnate Edward Filene and as associate editor at Century magazine.
the challenge of promoting the University to the public. In meeting notes, the faculty secretary summarized Frank’s message: “Selling the university must be a collaboration in which every man and woman who has one spark of interest in the University must share.” He not only saw a place for radio in that collaboration, he frequently made use of the medium himself. Occasionally, he failed to understand the importance of playing by the FRC’s rules as when he refused to give Terry permission to attend a critical hearing in Washington, D.C. More often, however, he preached the cause of non-profit radio with messianic zeal. His first year had coincided with the Fourth Radio Conference which anticipated the creation of the FRC. WHA staff members were optimistic that their station would meet the emerging mandate to serve the public interest, convenience, and necessity. At Lighty’s urging, Frank had authorized the creation of a 32-member, university-wide radio committee that would include faculty and staff from every department and college and thus promote a diversity of programming. Frank, himself, (and Meiklejohn) also sat on the committee.

Frank’s progressive views which he promoted through speaking engagements around the country brought him national attention. In 1927, H.L. Mencken profiled him briefly in the American Mercury as one of a half dozen current leaders who through dint of intelligence and a reformist impulse, had the potential to be the next American president. Frank’s public attacks on corporate America intensified after 1929 as the University began to feel the effects of the Depression. For example, at an annual father-son banquet in 1931, he told visiting parents that the western world “must resign itself to a drastic and revolutionary overturn if the captains of western capitalism fail to make the welfare of the people instead of money profits their primary aim.”

495 Memorandum from Glenn Frank, 16 September 1929. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-05, Box 2, Committee on Radio Broadcasting, 1929-30: Folder 018, Steenbock Library.
In another often-quoted speech that year he warned that American business and industry had to accept “higher wages than ever paid, shorter hours than ever known, and lower prices than ever existed.”\(^{498}\) His vocal support for a national redistribution of wealth through tax reform and legislation inevitably drew attacks from the state’s more conservative elements who accused him of fomenting communism and atheism on campus. His association with Meiklejohn did not help, because the students in the Experimental College were increasingly portrayed in the press as radicals. Some of Meiklejohn’s students were avowed members of the Communist party.\(^{499}\) When one student organized a march of unemployed factory workers in Madison, the *Capital Times* noted that athletes tried to break it up, resulting in “a battle between bearded ‘Experimenters’ and brawny members of the Wisconsin Club…bent on smashing the heads of the Reds.”\(^{500}\)

Accounts of student unrest were reported with some regularity in the *Daily Cardinal* in the Depression years, and Frank was sometimes criticized for not moving more forcefully against agitators. One such instance began with a 1932 May Day incident when a red banner was found flying over Bascom Hall on the morning of May 1\(^{st}\). Frank dismissed it as a “sheer prank or the ill-advised zeal of one radical youth” while his critics portrayed it as evidence of an incipient communist movement. Nonetheless, Frank was compelled to use his 1932 Convocation Address to deny that he was leading the University into a “riotous orgy of political, social, economic, religious, and moral anarchy.”\(^{501}\)

As the Depression continued, Frank increasingly found himself on the defensive and unable to mollify his critics. In 1933, a legislative assemblyman from Milwaukee pushed through a resolution calling for an investigation of extremism on campus. The so-called Higgins


Resolution was motivated partly by protests against compulsory ROTC by students whose views suggested “that they were believers of communism, bolshevism, and atheism.”\footnote{“Chapple Fires Charges at Faculty Socialism, Campus Degeneration,” \textit{Daily Cardinal}, November 17, 1931, p.1.} But the resolution also took aim at professors believed to be too radical and at a claim that legislative scholarships were awarded to extremists. Although the investigation did not find evidence to support the charges of communist influence on campus, Frank remained a lightning rod for critics, even as his politics moved rightward. Ironically, he was ultimately brought down because he was not deemed to be liberal enough.

The first hint of Frank’s willingness to accommodate the capitalists he had once denounced was his change of position on the acceptance of foundation money. In 1930, a reconfigured Board of Regents rescinded the earlier ban on gifts to the University. The President of the Board, citing a study of the original gift from Rockefeller’s foundation, declared that no evidence of improper influence had been detected. Quoting from the study, he noted that the policy was misguided in part because it singled out corporate contributions. “A gift with an ulterior purpose is quite as likely to be offered by an individual as by a corporation and the likelihood of accompanying pressure is greater.”\footnote{Ben Faast, ""Tainted Money"?," \textit{Wisconsin Alumni Magazine}, Vol. 31, No.7, April, 1930, p.269.} Frank not only acquiesced to the new policy; within months he successfully proposed that the University ask Rockefeller’s General Education Board for a $350,000 grant to aid various research projects.\footnote{Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin, 22 November 1930. University of Wisconsin Board of Regents, \url{http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/UWBoR.Nov221930}.} Frank’s harshest critic in the press, \textit{Capital Times} Editor William T. Evjue, excoriated the president for actively soliciting corporate funds. It was proof, he said, that “education is being corrupted by the eternal quest of university presidents and regents for big endowments and bequests from those who have money.” Further, he noted, by “passing the tin cup” to corporations, “the slippery and agile Mr. Frank” had...
revealed his true colors. Although Frank was willing to allow corporate gifts for research, there is no indication that he advocated any corporate or commercial funding for radio. In fact support for state funding remained strong throughout the University as indicated by an opinion piece in the alumni magazine in 1932. The columnist proclaimed that freedom of the radio was paramount in a democratic society and could be accomplished only through the proposed reservation of channels for educational broadcasters. “The question will arise sooner or later as to which shall be given preference—state or private enterprise. We believe that it is the business of the state to serve its people with a general educational program.” The article reflected Frank’s views on radio. Although his support for educational broadcasting did not waver, it became less of an asset for WHA as he grew more isolated.

Frank and WHA

Even before the Depression had begun, Frank was mindful of the power of commercial radio, and he was not willing to abandon the University’s own effort to offer an alternative. When the radio committee demanded a renewed focus on radio, he quickly endorsed its primary suggestion—a proposal to make WHA’s broadcasts available to any radio station in the state. Frank himself was so taken by the idea, that he did not want to wait for the next Board of Regents meeting to get approval for the land wire connections that would need to be installed. Instead, he sent a letter to the regents, informing them that WHA represented a “very great opportunity to broadcast information developed in its laboratories, libraries, and other services.” He asked each of the regents to respond with his reaction to the proposal or additional suggestions. Adopting the executive committee’s “fix it or quit” attitude, he concluded:

Our present radio situation is wholly unsatisfactory, and I agree with the radio committee that we can no longer ask our busy staff members to give of their time and effort to the preparation and broadcasting of radio talks over WHA unless we extend the service so that the addresses may be heard beyond the limits of a single country. The present WHA service is wholly intolerable and if the university is to continue radio broadcasting it must be on some new basis.507

The regents approved the proposal at their next meeting. In a letter to Wisconsin’s commercial stations, Frank informed them of the newly available service. “…any of the stations are privileged to run wires into the studio of WHA and to relay to the respective radio audiences the programs which are broadcast by the University.”508

To make the new service appealing, WHA needed more programming. Frank’s faith in the constructive role that government could play was shared by the station’s executive committee. In the summer and fall of 1929, Bennett, Ewbank, and Hopkins pursued collaborative programming arrangements with several state agencies. As a result, they were soon able to fill a greater portion of their daytime hours with new programs—financed by state agencies—that dealt with health, education, conservation, and other topics geared to engage listeners in public issues.509

Frank was also determined to add political coverage to WHA. Drawing upon icons of American history, Frank testified to the FRC in 1930 that WHA planned to revive the town meeting “similar to that held in New England in Puritan days” in hopes that debates over political issues could rouse the interest “which greeted the Lincoln-Douglas engagement.”510 One of the pioneering series that resulted from his efforts in 1932 was the Political Education Forum in

507 Glenn B. Frank to Board of Regents, 1929. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02 Box 2: Folder 007, Steenbock Library.
508 Glenn Frank to Station Directors, 1929. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 2, General Correspondence, 1926-1933: Folder 007, Steenbock Library.
509 For examples of the programming, see the monthly program guides which began publication in 1927. The University Antenna: Station WHA, December 1927. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-5, Box 15, Personnel and Programs: Folder 023, Steenbock Library.
which all viable candidates for state offices were offered thirty minutes of airtime to present their views to the public. The program featured candidates from the Democratic, Republican, Progressive, Socialist, and Prohibition parties, each of whom later expressed satisfaction with WHA’s evenhanded treatment. As McCarty would later report, the forum and other broadcasts by lawmakers were more than just a service to the public; they were a form of public relations that helped to win and maintain legislative support for WHA.\textsuperscript{511}

The station’s executive committee, while happy to partner with state agencies and political leaders, also renewed its efforts to involve other units of the University in programming. Football broadcasts, which had been in the programming line-up since 1923, were among the programs available to any Wisconsin station that wanted to carry WHA’s coverage on a sustaining basis. The executive committee also pursued a merger with the state’s station WLBL after which they planned to petition the FRC for a clear channel for Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{512} Frank testified before the FRC in 1930 that WHA contributed to the state’s agricultural interests, homemakers, schools, adult learners, and the general public interest. In an overview of the station’s administration compiled years later, Frank’s 1930 testimony was cited as evidence that WHA’s operation was “radically different from that of the commercial broadcasting station. Unhampered by the pressure of sponsors for mass audiences, WHA is free to experiment in the true public service uses of radio.”\textsuperscript{513}

The initial efforts to consolidate WHA and WLBL into a single clear channel did not succeed, despite a telegram sent by Governor Philip La Follette (son of Robert) taking exception to the FRC examiner’s report and despite testimony given to the FRC prepared in part by the state


\textsuperscript{512} Guy Hill to Walter J. Koehler, 28 March 1930. Harold B. McCarty Papers, Box 14, M87-133, WSHS.

\textsuperscript{513} Administration and Financing of Radio Station WHA, 1939. Harold Engel Papers, Box 14, M87-133, WSHS.
attorney general. Nonetheless, the two stations remained affiliated. In 1932, a telephone connection linked the two radio operations to give Wisconsin “its own little chain of two state stations.” The hook-up enabled the stations to simulcast the inauguration the following month of Wisconsin Governor Albert Schmedeman (who had unseated the incumbent La Follette). The telephone line was periodically eliminated for budgetary reasons during the Depression years, yet the notion of a statewide non-profit broadcasting system was permanently established with WHA serving the southern portion of the state and WLBL reaching the northern areas. A survey of listeners in the mid-1930s found that 80% of the state’s population could clearly tune in one or both state stations.

Creating an Economic Model

At the onset of the Depression, Frank did not include a funding request for radio in the pared-down budget he submitted to the state legislature for the 1931-33 biennium, partly because the proposed WHA-WLBL merger remained unsettled. Fearful that WHA would be forced to close, Edward Bennett, a member of the three-person executive committee, devised a plan to solicit contributions from the various state departments that were using radio. This strategy would take station collaboration with the state to a new level. Rather than simply partnering with WHA, the state would now be financing it directly. Earlier, McCarty had arranged for the installation of a studio in the Capitol Building, and he had begun a daily program of talks that featured members

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514 For a full description of the attempts to consolidate the two stations see Chapter 8 in Randall Davidson, 9XM Talking: WHA Radio and the Wisconsin Idea (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).
515 H.B. McCarty to Sam Snead, 31 December 1932. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-5, Box 2, General Subject: Folder 016, Steenbock Library.
516 One interesting side note is that the infusion of funding and equipment for WLBL enabled the station to carry the games of a nearby professional football team that had a small, but very loyal following—the Green Bay Packers.
517 WHA, Wisconsin's Pioneer, n.d. Harold Engel Papers, Box 14, M87-133, WSHS.
of various departments and commissions. McCarty believed that his efforts had given state officials “a sense of participation in the radio activities, making WHA not merely a university station but the state station.” His belief was borne out when two state agencies immediately responded to Bennett’s request for funding. Their substantial contributions drew the attention of the State Emergency Board, a group formed in the wake of the stock market crash to advise the governor on financial matters. The Emergency Board was comprised of the governor and the chairmen of the Finance Committees of both the Assembly and the Senate. The board quickly determined that the radio station should have a high priority. Although it was necessary to cut budgets throughout the state government, the board agreed that it would go easier on those agencies that had made contributions to radio. Additional support from the Emergency Board aided in the station’s purchase of transmitters, towers, and land—all of which had become available due to the recent merger of two commercial stations that needed only one facility.

In a matter of months, according to McCarty, WHA had moved from the brink of extinction—when Frank had omitted station funding from his budget proposal—to a position of state-guaranteed security that brought fresh optimism to the staff. “Things here are moving along real well,” he wrote during one of the darkest periods of the Depression, noting that in the week

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519 Transcript of Remarks by Harold McCarty from Meeting of Institute for Education by Radio, 1932. WHA Radio and Television, Box 2, Committee on Radio Broadcasting: 017, Steenbock Library. Underline in original.
520 This account of the evolution of state support was provided by McCarty when he served as a panelist in a round table conference at Ohio State in the summer of 1932. No verbatim account of McCarty’s remarks exists. WILL’s director had sent a copy of the “stenographic account” to McCarty, offering him the opportunity to edit his remarks so as not to be “embarrassed” by anything he had said. McCarty may have rambled in his oral presentation because he gratefully accepted the rewrite offer. Of the edited version McCarty noted that he had followed the outline of the discussion, yet he had “done considerable revising because the report seemed so broken and incoherent and at times pointless.” His rewrite was sent as an enclosure to the WILL director who passed it along to Ohio State, making it part of the official record of the round table.
to come, “we shall move to our new transmitter location south of town with some first class
towers instead of the clothes line antenna we have been using here on the University campus.”  
McCarty insisted that the close relationship with the state did not create any ethical
dilemmas for WHA. “There are no stipulations with the grant of money and no pressure of any
kind,” he said. If the funding arrangement had triggered an evolution of WHA from a “purely
university radio station” into a state station, it did not trouble McCarty. “As a matter of fact,” he
said, “we are considering changing the name and identification to the ‘State Station of
Wisconsin.’”

The support of the state made possible the launch of a major educational initiative in
1931 called the Wisconsin School of the Air. Designed for elementary and junior high school
use, it featured a series of instructional programs on topics ranging from music and story-telling
to history and science. The programs drew upon the expertise of faculty members and researchers
in various state departments. In discussing the program’s merits, McCarty drew a distinction
between WHA’s initiative and the educational programs carried on commercial stations. The
latter, he said, were “sponsored by commercial enterprises and quite naturally embody
advertising.” By contrast and in keeping with the state’s policy of non-commercialism in
education, McCarty said that the educational programming on WHA “is unhampered. It is
sponsored solely by the state, county and municipal educational agencies.” By using a standard
different than mass appeal WHA could design programming based on theories of learning. And
the survival of these programs would not depend upon persuading listeners to buy a product or

522 H.B. McCarty to Joseph F. Wright, 29 June 1932. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-5,
Box 2, General Subject: Folder 017, Steenbock Library.
523 Transcript of Remarks by Harold McCarty from Meeting of Institute for Education by Radio,
1932. WHA Radio and Television, Box 2, Committee on Radio Broadcasting: 017, Steenbock Library.
524 H.B. McCarty to Joseph F. Wright, 29 June 1932. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-5,
Box 2, General Subject: Folder 017, Steenbock Library.
525 Jack Stark, "The Wisconsin Idea: The University's Service to the State," Wisconsin Blue
526 Administration and Financing of Radio Station WHA, 1938, p.6. Harold B. McCarty Papers,
Box 14, M87-133, WSHS.
service. Combined with state agency programs and other information and entertainment shows, the Wisconsin School of the Air boosted the scheduled programming total to more than 50 hours a week, and it was drawing positive notice even from the networks.527

The economic model that evolved at WHA was distinct from other educational broadcasters in its symbiosis with state government.528 As he had in 1931 and 1933, Frank did not include WHA in his budget request for 1935, assuming that the Emergency Board would continue to fund the station. In what Penn described as a repudiation of sorts of the “Wisconsin Idea,” Frank told the legislature’s Joint Finance Committee that the radio station should not be the University’s financial burden because many of its programs were “not closely connected” to the school and instead served the citizens of Wisconsin.529 La Follette, a dedicated proponent of WHA, folded the station’s funding needs into the appropriation request for the Department of Agriculture and Markets which operated WLBL. The legislature approved the request, but in a rebuke to Frank, the lawmakers insisted on transferring WHA’s license to the Agriculture Department. The University Radio Committee retained complete control of the station, both operationally and editorially. For the remainder of the decade, as noted above, the legislature provided steady and generous appropriations to WHA. Although financially secure, the station remained on shaky grounds politically. Despite its broad support among state officials, it still needed to contend with the FRC and the radio industry.

528 First Annual Report of the Committee on Radio Broadcasting, February 1939. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-5, Box 27, General Subject, Document 564, Steenbock Library.
529 John Stanley Penn, "The Origin and Development of Radio Broadcasting at the University of Wisconsin to 1940." PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1940, p. 417.
Another Challenge

Incredibly, even as WHA was drawing critical acclaim from educators in other states and
countries, two commercial stations challenged its very existence. In submitting its routine
application for license renewal in 1933, WHA managers had been shocked to learn that WIBA in
Madison had applied to the FRC for a power increase and clear channel rights that would entail
the discontinuance of both WHA and WBLB.\textsuperscript{530} WIBA’s application asserted that the
commercial station could give:

\begin{quote}
…radio listeners in Wisconsin in particular and surrounding areas in general unique
programs which will originate at the seat of government of Wisconsin, and the seat of the
University of said state, such as educational, governmental, and agricultural information
and instruction; athletic and other University and State events; that the service to the State
and the University will be far superior to similar service now rendered by any existing
station.\textsuperscript{531}
\end{quote}

In other words, WIBA was claiming that it would do a better job of what WHA was already
doing. Two weeks later, a second assault was made by WTMJ in Milwaukee, a station that had
cooperated with WHA in the past. WTMJ applied to the FRC for a powerful station to be
operated on a frequency that would interfere with both WHA and WLBL. The application called
for the elimination of the two state-owned stations and offered to provide the University with free
air-time as a consolation. Ewbank scoffed at the offer. “We are on the air eight or nine hours a
day. It would be manifestly impossible for either of the petitioning companies, with its
advertising commitments, to guarantee to broadcast our education services at hours advantageous
to our listeners.” The professor added, “The claim of the commercial stations that they are
interested in educational broadcasting would be more convincing if they would cease applying for
the limited facilities held by educational stations.”\textsuperscript{532}

\textsuperscript{530} "Milwaukee Station Seeks Injunction to Oust WHA," \textit{Daily Cardinal}, November 9, 1933, p 1.
\textsuperscript{531} John Stanley Penn. "The Origin and Development of Radio Broadcasting at the University of
Wisconsin to 1940." PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1940, p.402.
In response to the twin threats, the University, with the support of the governor, sought once again to merge WHA and WLBL. Wisconsin’s State Attorney General filed an application for a high powered station that would share air-time with a commercial operator in Chicago. The FRC hearing was postponed until early in 1934. By then, the agency had received many letters from Wisconsin residents, University faculty, and state officials protesting the proposed elimination of WHA and WLBL. Before the hearing could take place, both WIBA and WTMJ withdrew their applications presumably because of public pressure.

**Another Clear Channel Attempt**

In Frank’s remaining tenure at Wisconsin he was faced with hostilities from alumni who held him to blame for the consistently poor showings of the football team, from the La Follette administration which was irritated by his drift away from progressive ideals and his growing criticisms of Roosevelt, and from the Board of Regents, many of whom were appointees of La Follette. One measure of how far he had fallen was an article in *American Mercury*. Less than a decade after Mencken had hailed him as a brilliant young reformer who was breathing new life into the Academy, the same publication held him up to national scorn: “Eight years after his arrival he has probably not a single sincere admirer left among the host who heralded his coming with hosannas,” wrote the author, a *Capital Times* columnist, in 1934. Two years later, the Board of Regents asked for Frank’s resignation. When he refused, the regents voted the following year to dismiss him after a public hearing that questioned his competency.

With Frank out of the picture, La Follette transferred the license for WHA back to the University in 1938, along with the license for WLBL.\textsuperscript{537} The Board of Regents then created a State Radio Council to oversee and advise radio operations. The nine member Council was composed of the directors of state agencies and University deans and other personnel including the University president who would chair the council.\textsuperscript{538} One of the nagging frustrations of the council was the ongoing lack of evening broadcast hours. WHA was required to sign off each evening at sundown and remain dark during the peak hours when farmers and laborers would be most inclined to listen. Eager to remedy the situation and reinvigorated by the reorganization, the council made its move in July. With the newly appointed president Clarence Dyskstra at the helm, WHA launched its boldest effort yet to secure a clear channel station. Taking a page from the commercial operators who had plagued them for so long, the WHA team requested a 50,000 watt station on a frequency held by WMAQ, an affiliate of NBC in Chicago. In its application to the FCC, the council noted that Wisconsin had no clear channel while Illinois had four, a violation of the FCC’s own goal of equitable distribution of radio facilities. The NCER hailed the move and predicted that it would be decided ultimately by the Supreme Court:

> The controversy centers around the question of which is more in the public interest a commercial station admittedly putting on good programs and serving a large audience, or a state-owned station supported by public taxation and dedicated exclusively to the service of the citizens of the state. It is likely also to provide an acid test of the adequacy of present methods used by the Communications Commission in determining what constitutes the public interest, convenience, and necessity in broadcasting.\textsuperscript{539}

To nobody’s surprise, NBC vowed to fight back, but the most bitter attack on WHA came from the \textit{Chicago Tribune}. Claiming that the station was a tool of the La Follette machine, the editorial

\textsuperscript{537} Following La Follette’s failed re-election bid, the Wisconsin Senate rescinded his executive order and transferred WHA back to the Department of Agriculture and Markets. Control of the station was returned to the University permanently in 1941.

\textsuperscript{538} Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin, 17 June 1938. University of Wisconsin Board of Regents, http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/UWBoR.Jun171938.

\textsuperscript{539} "On Wisconsin!," \textit{Education by Radio} Vol. 8, No. 7, August-September, 1938.
charged that state-owned radio “does not mean freedom of expression for the citizen,” rather, it was a monopoly akin to the totalitarian media systems of Germany, Italy, and Russia. According to the Tribune, the station promulgated only “the social and political ideas of the La Follettes” and “offers no adequate time for reply” from opponents. What happened next serves to illustrate the unique political environment of Wisconsin. WHA’s publicity director Harold Engel sought to counter the Tribune’s claim of political favoritism. He contacted legislators and political candidates of all stripes who had appeared on the Political Education Forum and asked them to respond with their own opinions of their experience with the station. Without exception, the letters of support that flooded into the station commended WHA for its fairness, equal opportunity, and lack of censorship. Particularly useful for Engel’s purposes were the testimonials of opposition party members which he put into a press release and sent to Broadcasting magazine. “I was as free to condemn the political machine established by Phil La Follette as I was to elaborate upon my work in the assembly,” wrote one Democratic lawmaker. “As the nominee for governor on the Union Party ticket and definitely and absolutely opposed to the ‘La Follette machine’ I wish to say that if the same Chicago Tribune were half as fair as…WHA, it would be a decidedly cleaner and more wholesome paper.”

The controversy sparked by the Tribune attack had drawn the attention of Wisconsin Congressman Thomas Amlie. He took it upon himself to contact each of the FRC commissioners on behalf of the station’s bid for a clear channel station, although he noted in his letters that he was writing “without the knowledge of any person connected with WHA.” Amlie told the commissioners that he had been “appalled by the increase of commercialization” and the

540 “Piracy on the Airwaves,” Chicago Tribune, October 2, 1938, p.16.
541 Comments on Chicago Tribune Attack on WHA Facilities Application 1938. Harold Engel Papers, Box 3, Folder 2, WSHS.
542 Special to Broadcasting Magazine, 17 October 1938. Harold Engel Papers, Box 3, Folder 2, Mss 138 AF, WSHS. La Follette’s defeat in the November election should have put to rest any lingering concerns about WHA’s influence over state government.
543 Amlie was a long-time supporter of non-commercial radio. In 1932, he introduced a bill into the House of Representatives that would have prohibited all advertising on radio on Sundays.
“steady deterioration in the quality of programs” on commercial radio. He advised that “…extending favorable consideration to non-commercial stations like WHA would be one way to provide the industry with wholesome competition.” Amlie heard back from five of the seven commissioners, and he forwarded their responses to WHA’s director Harold McCarty. In reply to Amlie, McCarty noted that the application continued to attract widespread support from a variety of educational, civic, and commerce groups as well as petitions signed by hundreds of citizens. McCarty also expressed shock at the letter Amlie had received from FCC Commissioner Eugene O. Sykes. McCarty noted that Sykes had told Amlie that the application hearing was set for January 27th. “That is the first and only indication we have had that a date had been set for the hearing,” McCarty wrote. “No official notice has been received.” It may have been a simple oversight that WHA’s director was not contacted by the FCC. However, in light of the general disregard for education broadcasters that had been manifested in the past, McCarty suspected a more sinister ploy. Amlie agreed to use his Washington D.C. office to help keep the application process on track.

The application hearing was repeatedly postponed until the legislature could approve funding to defend the application. The hearing was finally set for November of 1939. In the meantime, the new governor, Julius Heil, had shown less enthusiasm for WHA than his predecessor. In fact, Heil rescinded La Follette’s executive order that had triggered the reorganization. As a result, the state radio council went out of existence. Heil still agreed to pursue the clear channel effort, but he wanted input from all parties involved. To that end, he convened a meeting with the University Radio Committee, the attorney general, NBC executives,

544 Thomas R. Amlie to F.R. McNinch, 5 November 1938. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 3, General Correspondence: 1932-1950, Steenbock Library.
545 Harold McCarty to Thomas R. Amlie, 16 December 1938. WHA Radio and Television, Box 3, General Correspondence: 1932-50, Steenbock Library.
and representatives from the commercial radio industry in Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{548} NBC demanded that WHA give up its clear channel aspirations, insisting that the increased power WHA was requesting would be an unnecessary expense for the state. The NBC representatives also offered to provide evening hours on their Wisconsin affiliates. However, they did not specify how many hours, and they ignored repeated requests from the governor to put their proposal in writing.\textsuperscript{549} Meanwhile, the Finance Committee of the State Assembly voted to refuse funding for the application process. Without the means to hire the necessary counsel to prepare and defend the case, the University Radio Committee had little choice but to withdraw their petition for a clear channel station.

**Football and WHA**

The broadcasting of football games never became as big an issue at the University of Wisconsin as at other universities. Although the Carnegie Commission Report in 1929 stimulated as much debate and calls for reform at Wisconsin as at other football schools, there is little evidence of discussion about radio coverage.\textsuperscript{550} In 1931, McCarty, who had recently been promoted to program director of WHA assumed the position of announcer for Badger football games.\textsuperscript{551} He was an immediate success. As the *Daily Cardinal* put it: “While crowds in Randall stadium at the Wisconsin-Purdue game were being thrilled by forward passes and end runs, those


\textsuperscript{550} Howard J. Savage et al., *American College Athletics* (New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1929). President Frank lodged several defenses of Wisconsin that were included as footnotes in the Carnegie Report. For example, to contentions that subsidization of athletes was in full force at Wisconsin, Frank responded, “I find no evidence of overt violations of the Conference agreements.” p.228.

\textsuperscript{551} The early 1930s are generally considered to comprise the second period of radio development at WHA. Although Bennett, Ewbank, and Hopkins remained in charge, younger faculty and staff took over much of the day-to-day management of the station.
in the outer world were entertained from high atop the Press box, which cups the east side of the
field.” 552 Hailing from the Speech Department, McCarty gave a “rapid fire word-picture of the
game,” according to the student newspaper, which would “make Floyd Gibbons feel like a
beginner in a school for stammerers.” 553

But while McCarty was charming radio listeners, a significant drop in gate receipts was
troubling University officials. The Business Manager for athletics reported a decrease from
$147,000 to $72,000 from 1930 to 1931. 554 Athletic Director George Little agreed to abolish the
football B team in a cost-cutting move, but maintained his support of minor sports. 555 Lingering
indignation over the excesses of football exposed in the Carnegie Commission Report,
particularly the high salaries paid to football coaches, may have prompted one Board of Regents
member to single out the football team for further cuts rather than abolish other sports. The Daily
Cardinal quoted Regent August Backus of Minneapolis as demanding significant reductions in
the football staff. “We do not intend to make the taxpayers of the state pay for the expenses of the
past football season,” he said. 556

The following season, game attendance continued to decline, bringing in receipts that
were $40,000 below the pre-season projections. 557 As noted in Chapter Two, radio, in addition to
the Depression, was declared to be a predominant cause of the drop-off in attendance within the
Big Ten Conference. Wisconsin’s Athletic Business Manager George Levis concurred with
Griffith’s assessment, insisting that radio broadcasts and a lack of money—not a lack of

553 Floyd Gibbons was a radio announcer famed for his fast-talking style of delivery. Among the
complimentary letters that poured into the station after McCarty’s first broadcast was one from a young
lady who wanted to know whether the “triple-tongued announcer” was married.
555 "Minor Sports Program Due for Drastic Cut as Athletic Funds Are Low," Daily Cardinal,
November 20, 1931.
556 "Drastic Cut of Football Staff Expenses Hinted at by Regents," Daily Cardinal, December 2,
1931, p.1.
557 "Football Gate Receipts Fall $40,000 Below Estimates," Daily Cardinal, November 15, 1932,
p.1.
interest—were keeping people away from the stadium on game day.\textsuperscript{558} Still, he never suggested abandoning radio broadcasts. Neither did the station consider it. In fact, WHA’s offer of its programming to other stations insured wider coverage than ever of football games. As at other universities, football was valued for its public relations potential. It drew attention to the school and piqued the interest of potential students and their parents. At Wisconsin, publicity that focused on the football team—whose members exhibited strength, discipline, and loyalty to the institution—offered an antidote to the image of student radicals. The alumni magazine admitted that big-time football had its problems, but concluded that:

> There is nothing harmful in the great crowds that flock to our enormous college stadiums in the pleasant days of the fall…to witness well-trained, well-coached teams engaged in the most thrilling sport we Americans know. College football games perform a fine public service in bringing together huge masses of people…some of whom perhaps were gaining their first standards of sport. In this sense the big games tend to develop better Americanism and a truer democratic spirit.\textsuperscript{559}

Wisconsin’s Alumni Club of New York seconded that sentiment. Noting that football was a “distinctly American game,” the club members wrote that it “furnishes a lesson to all onlookers of the value of team play and cooperation which is the same sort of effort that is needed in the every day [sic] affairs of life and citizenship.” No other sport, they wrote, can “better develop in youth the qualities which are essential to the best kind of American citizenship.”\textsuperscript{560}

As at Ohio State, criticism of football was met with rhetoric that linked the game to democracy and other American values. Although nobody at Wisconsin overtly compared sports competitions to the free enterprise system, commercialism was another quality that was about to be associated with Badger football.

The Lure of Advertising

It is not as if WHA had no temptations to commercialize. Offers from potential sponsors and advertising agencies arrived in a small but consistent stream. Typical of such offers was one from the Standard Chemical Manufacturing Company seeking to use WHA to sell its “high grade of toiletries under the name of Belle Peau (literally ‘Lovely Skin’).” The company promised an exclusive territory and a commission on all sales in that territory.\(^{{561}}\) Although none of the offers was ultimately accepted, the station management was often intrigued enough to follow up with a request for more details.\(^{{562}}\) WHA’s staff also followed with interest the economic models adopted by other educational broadcasters. When *Broadcasting* magazine featured a story about Loyola University’s spacious new studios, financed partially by advertising, McCarty wrote to the school with a frank request for details on its financial arrangement. Perhaps hinting at his envy, McCarty confided that “such magnificence excites our curiosity.” He also revealed the pressures he was under at Wisconsin when he noted that a committeeman at a recent state budget hearing had asked why WHA could not be supported at least in part by advertising.\(^{{563}}\)

The response from Loyola’s director, W.A. Burk, appeared to startle McCarty. Not only had the Jesuit school embraced commercialism, it had decided that non-profit models simply would not work because they would never be able to match the quality of commercial stations which had more money to spend on talent and program development. Further, Loyola rejected the argument that educational stations could provide programming that did not interest commercial operators. In the margins of the four-page response from Burk, a series of exclamation points had been made, most likely by McCarty, next to a paragraph that stated: “We do not weary and drive

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\(^{{561}}\) John W. Gamble to WHA, 6 May 1932. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, General Correspondence 1926-1933, Box 2: Folder 016 Steenbock Library.

\(^{{562}}\) Harold Engel to John W. Gamble, 13 May 1932. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 2, General Correspondence, Folder 016, Steenbock Library.

\(^{{563}}\) Harold B. McCarty to WWL Radio, 31 December 1932. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 2, General Correspondence 1926-1933: Folder 007, Steenbock Library.
away our listeners with too much ‘talk,’ too much ‘education.’ Indeed, our daily educational broadcast rarely exceeds fifteen minutes….I do not believe that our people will stand for more!”

McCarty’s shock would be understandable because Burk’s stance was such an extreme departure from the standard tenets of most university-licensed broadcasters who eschewed advertising and believed that the academy offered a vast pool of talent and content. In Wisconsin’s case, it was not only the University but many state agencies that filled the airwaves—primarily with talks and lectures. In addition, McCarty and Engel had recently launched the Wisconsin School of the Air, modeled after Ohio State’s radio education program. The School of the Air had ten weekly radio courses aimed at grade school students and three weekly high school programs, and it was in the process of developing adult education courses. Furthermore, Wisconsin was deeply enmeshed in the national effort to protect educational broadcasters through federal reservation of channels. As a member of the Association of College and University Broadcasting Stations (ACUBS), WHA staff members and even President Frank had lobbied state and federal lawmakers on behalf of the reservation proposal. WWL’s director, by contrast, maintained that educational broadcasters were not meeting the public service standard mandated by the FRC because their programs were “of comparatively little interest to the general public.” As for the national coalition of educational broadcasters, led by NCER’s Armstrong Perry, Burk said their real aim was securing “nice fat jobs and salaries for themselves—and trips abroad to study conditions in European countries!”

Although McCarty remained adamantly opposed to commercialization, his assistant director Engel appeared to be not quite convinced. At roughly the same time that McCarty was corresponding with WWL, Engel was making inquiries about the sponsorship potential of school

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564 W.A. Burk to Harold B. McCarty, 3 January 1933. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 Box 2, General Correspondence, 1926-33: Folder 007, Steenbock Library.
565 Ibid.
broadcasts. Having read about a Rochester, New York station that had begun programs geared for
the classroom, Engel wrote to ask whether that station, WHAM, had made a significant profit.
Perhaps, seeking an argument to bolster his own inclination, Engel asked, “Do you think such
programs help reduce school expenses by supplying instruction which teachers would otherwise
give?”\(^{566}\) Although no reply from WHAM was found, it is unlikely that Engel could have
overcome objections to advertising from his superiors, especially once the state-supported model
proved successful.

The strict taboos on commercialism at WHA were gradually loosened throughout the
decade. Early in 1938, the University Radio Committee convened a special meeting to consider a
proposal for a program to be broadcast over WIBA that featured the student newspaper and
student announcers. As explained at the meeting, representatives of the \textit{Daily Cardinal} had
already negotiated a deal with Lucky Strike Cigarettes that gave the American Tobacco Company
exclusive privileges on a series that would feature two student newscasters each week. The \textit{Daily
Cardinal} would be paid fifty dollars per week with each announcer earning an additional ten
dollars. The committee’s objection was not to the commercialization per se, but to the exclusivity
feature and to references in the advertisement to the campus. Ewbank summarized the
committee’s options: Either reject the plan or allow a trial run with some provisions. To spare the
\textit{Daily Cardinal} the embarrassment and possibly legal problems of reneging on its deal, the
committee voted to permit the project with the stipulation that the agreement would be re-
negotiated to eliminate exclusivity and mention of the campus.\(^{567}\)

\(^{566}\) Harold Engel to Lew Stark, 5 April 1933. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, Box 2,
General Correspondence, 1926-33, Folder 016, Steenbock Library.
\(^{567}\) Meeting of the University Committee on Radio Broadcasting, 18 February 1938. WHA Radio
and Television, 41/06/02-4, General Correspondence, 1932-50, Box 2: Folder 003 Steenbock.
Sponsored Broadcasts of Badger Football

The ever-rising popularity of intercollegiate football as a national spectator sport made Badger gridiron games somewhat of an anomaly on the broadcast schedule—programming with truly mass appeal. Football was considered a special case for another reason as well. Unlike many of the lectures by University and state agencies or even musical and dramatic events presented on the air, football games would take place regardless of whether they were broadcast. That was the justification the Board of Regents used in advocating “certain privileges” for football when it came to radio broadcasting, namely, a lessening of the ban on advertising. Although no evidence was found of pressure from commercial stations, it seems likely that Wisconsin’s situation might have been similar to Ohio State’s in that commercial stations were no longer interested in carrying football on a sustaining basis.

Like other University programs, football broadcasts were available to all Wisconsin stations beginning in 1929. However, there was not room in the broadcast booth for every station to have a direct line and its own announcer. To accommodate the number and variety of stations interested in Wisconsin football, a set of regulations became codified over the years. It was not until 1950, with the new medium of television established, that the Board of Regents approved a written version of the regulations. However, the major aspects of the policy came together in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{568} The distinctive feature of the policy is that WHA would originate a non-commercial radio broadcast that would be made available to commercial stations for no charge with one unique stipulation. Those stations had to carry ten farm product promotions for each game—half to be carried during the game and the remaining half to air during the 24 hours preceding the game. The Athletic department would take responsibility for the announcers and their travel

\textsuperscript{568} Special Regulations for Radio & Television Broadcasts of Athletic Events, 13 May 1950. WHA Radio and Television, 41/05/02-5, General Subject, Box 27: Sports Broadcasting Policies, Steenbock.
expenses and would assume the costs for operators and rental equipment at away games and broadcast line rentals. The State Department of Agriculture would reimburse the Athletic Department for these and other expenses.

Another primary component was that no exclusive broadcasting rights would be granted, a policy first enunciated in 1929. Any station could carry the games for no fee on a sustaining or non-commercial basis—an obvious manifestation of the “Wisconsin Idea.” However, as a member of the Big Ten, Wisconsin was obliged to follow Conference guidelines on radio matters. One stipulation put into place in the 1930s allowed the visiting school to designate one station from its own region to broadcast the game. Since some conference schools commercialized their broadcasts, Wisconsin was bound to accommodate the commercial operator chosen by the visiting school. This created problems for Wisconsin throughout the 1930s. For example, at a meeting of the University Radio Committee in 1938, McCarty reported that an ad agency had demanded that WHA observe the necessary time intervals so that commercials could be broadcast by two Michigan stations. According to the meeting minutes, “The general question of commercialization and the policies involved were discussed…the whole situation is open to some question.”

Perhaps to avert charges of discrimination from Wisconsin stations, WHA ultimately adopted a policy that accepted both in-state and out-of-state commercial stations. However, those stations were obliged to pay a broadcasting privilege fee. This was similar to the policy adopted by Ohio State.

The non-commercial nature of WHA’s own football broadcasts is challenged by a reference in the student newspaper to the 1932 season. In September, the Daily Cardinal announced that WHA would no longer take commercial breaks during its game broadcasts, but

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569 Meeting of the University Committee on Radio Broadcasting, 28 September 1938. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4 General Correspondence, 1932-50, Box 3: Folder 003, Steenbock Library.

570 According to a fee schedule from the 1930s, the charge was based on 1 ½ times the hourly domestic time rate established by the station involved, with a minimum fee of $150 for the entire game.
would provide a “complete play-by-play report without interruption for commercial announcements.” Furthermore, according to the article, “The time between halves usually taken up by advertisements will be utilized for short talks by sports luminaries.” What is puzzling is that no evidence was found to suggest that WHA had ever taken commercial breaks. There is no indication of commercial sponsorship in the files of any of the primary station operators or managers. There is no budgetary evidence of income from advertising. And there are the repeated claims of McCarty, Assistant Station Manager Harold Engel, and others that the station “has never sold a penny’s worth of time and so does not compete for a share of the available advertising revenue.” And yet the newspaper article certainly suggests that advertisements had once been standard. It may be that the Daily Cardinal was referring to broadcasts by the commercial stations that carried the games or by the stations designated by visiting teams. Another possibility is that Wisconsin’s athletic department, as noted earlier in this chapter, may have negotiated broadcasts with other stations. If that was the case, the department handled any advertising and kept the revenue for itself. This would have allowed WHA managers to maintain that they had never sold a minute’s worth of advertising, although such a claim would appear to rest on a technicality. A third explanation may be that the Daily Cardinal was using a very broad definition of advertising. In 1931, some football fans had complained about announcers who rattled off statistics and gave game recaps at half-time rather than allowing listeners to enjoy the band music, singing, and cheering of the crowd. Wisconsin’s alumni magazine quoted one frustrated listener who had written to Cornell, Princeton, Chicago, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin as well as to the national networks to plea for more collegiate color and less irksome factual details. “The technical, verbal review of the game between halves destroys the dramatic


572 "No Time for Sale." August 1936. Harold B. Engel Papers, Box 14, M87-133, p.3, WSHS.
continuity and lets the hearers down when as a matter of fact, the band music singing and other
events give sustained interest to the drama.”573

In the end, WHA quietly succumbed to broadcasters’ desire for sponsored football. The
station continued to carry its own broadcast that was commercial-free, although it carried public
service announcements for the Agriculture Department and other state agencies. Unlike the
educational programs on commercial radio that provoked complaints from listeners, there was
almost no criticism of commercialized football games. Wisconsin continued to carry its own
football broadcasts and make them available to other stations throughout the 1940s and 1950s.
However, radio did not provide a significant revenue stream as television one day would. In 1952,
broadcast privilege fees for radio when combined with both television revenue and stadium
concessions totaled just three percent of the total gross income of intercollegiate athletics
(compared to 75 percent from football gate receipts, eight percent from the gate at basketball
games, and 14 percent from the sale of coupon books to faculty and students.)574 There is a
suggestion in the correspondence files that football broadcasts were becoming too much of an
effort for the slight return on investment. By the late 1930s, WHA was firmly entrenched on the
airwaves. Its reputation had spread nationally on the strength of its innovative educational
programs, and this—not athletics—was the content that motivated the station management.

Earle M. Terry had fought literally to his dying day to bring non-commercial broadcasts
of football to the people of Wisconsin. Two decades later, a clearly frustrated Harold McCarty
would confide to an associate that, “this athletic broadcasting activity is still causing us trouble,

573 "While the Clock Strikes the Hour," Wisconsin Alumni Magazine, Vol.32, No.4, 1931,p.172. The writer, Carl Beck, may have had more interest than most in hearing the college songs. A graduate of Wisconsin’s class of ’02, he had written the words for the fight song “On Wisconsin.”

and one of these days we are going to get so fed up that we may cancel out completely and renounce all participation in sports broadcasting.”

575 Harold McCarty to James A. Mott, 9 April 1957. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-5, Box 27, General Subject: Sports Broadcasting Policies, Steenbock Library.
Chapter 5

Penn State

Located in the exact geographical center of the state of Pennsylvania, this college station has been heard in all but six states in the union. The distance record made in January was over 1900 miles to Prescott, Arizona where reception was reported ‘very audible.’ Penn State is one of the few colleges in the country that maintains [sic] regular broadcasting from its own station, which in this instance was a gift of the college alumni of Pittsburgh. 576

Penn State College News Release
May 28, 1924

Penn State’s history of athletic broadcasting in the 1920s and 1930s is trifling compared to Wisconsin’s and Ohio State’s. However, it is far more typical of the fate that befell dozens of other educational institutions whose licenses were revoked, permitted to expire, or sold to commercial interests. One challenge for Penn State is that it was not located in the state capital or even in one of the state’s major cities. Tucked into a farming valley in the mountainous central region of Pennsylvania, the college was geographically isolated and politically unconnected. No state official ever championed the cause of Penn State radio. Yet, what makes Penn State an interesting study is that big-time college football emerged at almost precisely the same time as radio. In 1920, the Board of Trustees voted to grant “the small triangular strip of woods behind the present baseball grand-stand” to create an enlarged Beaver Field complete with bleachers. 577

To be sure, the stadium was far from the equal of the behemoths at Ohio State and Wisconsin. However, by the time WPAB was established in 1923, Penn State had played in the Rose Bowl

576 “For the Radio Editor,” Penn State College News Service, May 28, 1924. Campus Radio, A 555.02, Folder 1, PSULSC.
577 “Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Pennsylvania State College,” 14 June 1920. Board of Trustees Supporting Papers, AR 04.04, Group 6, Box 17, PSULSC.
and the stadium was slated for further expansion. In the mid-1920s, it appeared to be a given that these two institutions—Penn State football and campus radio—should be intertwined. Alumni appreciated the broadcasts, and no other station had expressed an interest in carrying the Nittany Lions’ home games. However, the combined pressure of the FRC and the Depression proved to be more than Penn State’s station could withstand. The College allowed its license to expire in 1932. When electronic coverage of football finally resumed in 1938 it was on commercial radio, and the coverage was sponsored by the Atlantic Refining Company. There is no evidence to suggest that listeners were bothered by the oil commercials that punctuated the game broadcasts. Commercialization had become the undisputed system of broadcasting. Of all the informational, educational, and entertainment offerings that Penn State had once hoped to propagate through the airwaves, only big-time football interested the commercial operators.

Penn State’s story follows the same arc upon which educational radio throughout the country could be plotted. Created and nurtured in physics and engineering labs at the dawn of the broadcast era, Penn State radio seemed poised to become a critical extension tool of the college. Its promise peaked in the mid-1920s—a time when government officials, industry representatives, and educators were in rough agreement concerning the public service responsibility of broadcasters. In the increasingly politicized debates that followed the creation of the FRC in 1927, Penn State radio was nudged into oblivion by a dearth of funding, a lack of support within the college or state administration, and the mounting bureaucratic demands of the federal government. In the six-year period from 1932-38, radio at Penn State was relegated to amateur hobbyists. It was during this period, that the radio industry consolidated its claims to the airwaves. Although Penn State no longer had its own station, the administration and athletic

579 “Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees,” 29 April 1932. Board of Trustees Supporting Papers, AR05.21, Group 6, Box 10, PSULSC.
580 N.W. Ayer Vice President to Ridge Riley, 1 June 1938. PPI Central Files AI/02.07, Contracts and Agreements, PSULSC
department considered offering football broadcasts to any station that wanted them. An undated analysis of a “free network” noted that a state institution should not discriminate among radio stations. The analysis concluded, however, that a problem arose due to Penn State’s affiliation with the NCAA and its practice of selling broadcast rights to a single station within each market.581 In other words, Penn State would not exercise leadership on the issue. Instead, it would follow the commercial path blazed by others.

**Origins of Penn State Sports Broadcasting**

The marriage of football and electronic media at Penn State began in 1911 with a game against the University of Pennsylvania. Although several hundred Penn State fans made the 200-mile journey by horse-drawn cab and train to Philadelphia, hundreds more assembled on campus to receive updated reports via the college’s new wireless station. The set-up involved a telephone connection from Franklin Field to the Marconi Station on top of Wanamaker’s Department Store in Philadelphia.582 At the end of each quarter, the score was phoned to the wireless operator who then relayed the information to Penn State. N.M. Slaughter, the Electrical Engineering professor who had arranged to receive the transmission, gave the score to his assistant who then covered a distance of several hundred yards from the wireless station to Old Main, the campus’s central building, where he announced each update to the gathered fans. As recounted in Ridge Riley’s history of Penn State football, the Nittany Lions’ victory over their more prestigious interstate rival prompted two instantaneous celebrations—one by the Penn State team and students in Philadelphia and another by those in Old Main who had followed the action through the

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581 "Free" Network, Undated. PPI Central Files, AI 02.07, Contracts and Agreements, PSULSC.  
transmitted dots and dashes of Morse Code. The excitement stirred by the radio telegraphy reports of the game may have influenced the choice of a gift to the college by the Class of 1912—a 200-foot steel tower to enhance wireless service to and from Penn State’s radio stations.

Although still a point-to-point medium, Penn State’s wireless station had demonstrated its ability to create one of the components that would be necessary for mass communication—an audience with a shared interest in a particular topic. That football was a popular programming choice at Penn State is not surprising. The school’s isolated location was perceived as one disadvantage to its athletic program. In the first two decades of Penn State football, opposing schools sometimes declined to travel to the remote locale in the mountains of central Pennsylvania, so the team enjoyed less than its fair share of the home field advantage. Another disadvantage of athletics was the rural population base which neither justified the construction of a large stadium nor sustained the local boosterism that city-based teams could count on. As summed up by Penn State President Edwin E. Sparks in 1920, “We lack the strength of city pride in our appeals and we lack great cosmopolitan newspapers through which to appeal to the public.” Radio could address both deficiencies by taking the game action to an audience that extended far beyond the school’s own valley and by generating the type of mass excitement for a football team that could send it into the ranks of big-time athletics. Penn State’s next president would recognize that potential.

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586 President’s Annual Statement at Commencement, June 16 1920. Board of Trustees Supporting Papers, Group 6, Box 17, AR 04.04, PSULSC.
The Thomas Era

In 1921, Dr. John M. Thomas assumed the presidency of Penn State with an ambitious agenda that included turning the college into a major university. While welcoming private contributions to a recently created “Emergency Building Fund,” Thomas was mindful of Penn State’s special status as a land-grant college, and he expected the state legislature to help him move the institution to the next level. His inaugural address hinted at his readiness to explore this relatively new economic model for higher education that drew upon taxpayer support:

There is no example in the history of American higher education of a large and successful state university built upon a private foundation….You cannot inject the quality and genius of the American state universities into an old established institution fathered by private motive and developed under private control.587

Thomas appeared to understand and appreciate the public relations value of football, and he did not hesitate to exploit it. At a pregame pep rally in 1921, he asserted that football was as beneficial to the spectators who watched as to the athletes who played. “It is all a mistake to say that the men on the bleachers get no benefit,” he said. “They receive incalculable benefit in the spirit that surges through them in support of the team—the spirit of determination and irresistible attack.” If spectators could be infused with such passion, why not radio listeners? Thomas implicitly recognized football as a legitimate educational program. Penn State, as a land-grant college, was duty-bound to extend its educational programs to the citizenry. Therefore, the opportunity to listen and learn from radio broadcasts of football games, according to Thomas’ logic, was a right to be enjoyed by every taxpayer in the commonwealth.588

Penn State students were the first audience to take advantage of electronic accounts of Penn State football. According to a 1921 newspaper clipping, Penn Staters had “telephone returns” from every away game that fall—including one against the University of Washington on

588 The taxpayer’s right to hear broadcasts of football games from land grant institutions was never codified in Pennsylvania law as it was in some other states such at Oklahoma and Nebraska.
the west coast. “Special arrangements have been made to have play-by-play details of the game transmitted to the Armory where the entire student body, or as many of them as can crowd” could hear the game action as it unfolded, according to the article. Although still a point-to-point transmission in 1921, Penn State’s radio telephony would soon cast a broader net.

Although the radio station had been sealed for the duration of World War I, research at Penn State had not stagnated entirely as it did at most institutions of higher learning. At the request of the federal government, the College created special classes in wireless telegraphy and signaling and became a training center for the U.S. Army Signal Corps. Soon after the station reopened in the fall of 1920, students and faculty in the Department of Electrical Engineering resumed telephonic research at experimental station 8XE. In November of that year, the station received presidential election returns from Frank Conrad, an amateur who operated from station 8XK which later became KDKA in Pittsburgh. That historic transmission, now commonly recognized as the first licensed radio broadcast in the nation, was picked up by 8XE which had the town’s sole receiving set. As returns arrived on campus, a courier delivered the results to a downtown newsstand and to the University Club which posted each update.

The capacity to send voice broadcasts was made possible by alumni gifts. In 1921, two Pittsburgh alumni donated the equipment and supplies used to build the College’s first significant broadcast transmitter. The following year, the Board of Trustees authorized the construction of a new broadcasting station. When the Commerce Department created a class of licenses known as

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589 "Penn State Crowd Will Miss Supper to Read Football," December 3, 1921. Intercollegiate Athletics, Hugo Bezdek Scrapbooks, 1920-21, M/04.29, Box 1, PSULSC.
590 Edwin Sparks, President’s Report to the Board of Trustees, 22 January 1919. Board of Trustees Supporting Papers, Group 6, AR 04.04, Box 17, PSULSC.
592 Gilbert Crossley, "History of 8XE," December 1 1952. A 555.02, Box 1: Campus Radio, PSULSC.
“limited commercial,” Penn State was quick to apply. The College retained its experimental license, which enabled the engineering department to continue research on the physics of radio—primarily how to receive and send a clearer signal over greater distances. But the early radio operators understood the distinction between coded transmissions—viewed as a technical conduit of information akin to a telephone—and broadcast which had the potential for far-reaching social and educational applications. In November of 1922, the Department of Commerce granted a broadcast license to Penn State with the call letters WPAB. “The value of this service to the college cannot be estimated at this time, but the possibilities are very great,” the alumni magazine predicted.

As at other educational stations, Penn State radio was shaped by a handful of professors and students whose own enthusiasm for the new medium was the primary factor in the creation of campus radio. N.M. Slaughter, the professor who instigated the 1911 football coverage was instrumental in constructing the first station. In addition to soliciting donations of equipment from manufacturing companies, he also dug into his own pockets to purchase necessary equipment. Slaughter also attempted to facilitate transmissions between the College and the state capital in Harrisburg. His experiments did not succeed. He believed that one factor may have been the copper roof on the dome of the capital building which could have distorted the radio signal. Despite his failure to make a radio connection between the two sites, his research led him into

595 S.E. Frost, Jr., Education’s Own Stations (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937). pp. 320-333. In 1918, a fast-moving fire destroyed the Main Engineering Building at Penn State. Lost in the blaze were equipment, furnishing, and many of the early records of radio development at the College. As a result, the early history is somewhat sketchy and relies to a great extent on memories recorded years and even decades after the actual events. Much of the early history of Penn State radio in this paper relies upon a report prepared by the head of Extension in 1936 which also formed the basis of the Penn State chapter in Frost’s book.
important investigations of the influences of mineral deposits on radio transmissions. He later went to work for the Marconi Company.\footnote{Nugent M. Slaughter. Biographical Vertical Files, ABVF Slaughter, PSULSC.}

Dr. E.C. Woodruff was another early contributor. According to reminiscences that a former amateur radio operator drew from his diaries of the time, Woodruff operated an amateur station as early as 1914 under the call letters CMP for “Call Me Please.”\footnote{George S. Wickizer, “Historical Notes: Penn State Radio, 1922-25,” 13 March 1975. Biographical Vertical Files, MSVF Wickizer, George S., MSVF/AN 1568, PSULSC.} Woodruff also designed the station’s first transmitter. His primary research focus was on the signaling system of electrical street cars, so he did not take an active role in the management of the radio station. Nonetheless, the 1931-32 Annual Report of the Department of Electrical Engineering notes that Woodruff had supplied “a large amount of radio communication apparatus at his own expense.”\footnote{Dean's Annual Report of the School of Engineering, 1931. Board of Trustees Supporting Papers, Group 6, PSUA/11/60, PSULSC.}

The three men whose initiative and ingenuity were most responsible for Penn State’s decade of broadcasting that began in 1922 were Charles L. Kinsloe, Gilbert Crossley, and R.L. Sackett. Kinsloe joined the faculty in 1907, and within two years, he was the head of the Department of Electrical Engineering. He became the supervisor of the new radio station in the early 1920s. Kinsloe was as adept at the technical aspects of radio as he was attuned to the programming needs. His involvement in many aspects of campus life—including athletics, the Alumni Association, and the Thespians—no doubt helped him to mine various areas of the college for programming ideas.\footnote{“Know Your Trustees...Charles J. Kinsloe.” Biographical Vertical Files, MSVF Kinsloe,Charles L., PSULSC.} Often, he was the College’s representative at national conferences on educational radio. Perhaps, one of his greatest contributions was hiring an undergraduate, Gilbert L. Crossley, to take over the day-to-day management of the station.
According to Keller’s history, Crossley deserves “the credit of building the radio station into a modern broadcasting plant.” It was Crossley who actually constructed the transmitter that Woodruff designed, and who made the regular upgrades to equipment and power that the federal government began to demand in the late 1920s. Crossley’s technical skills were sophisticated enough that he could often build or redesign pieces of equipment for a fraction of their cost on the open market. In time, Crossley became a professor of engineering, helping to educate the next generation of radio operators.

Although Sackett was less involved in the ongoing operation of WPAB, he was its most active promoter among the faculty and administration. Dean of the School of Engineering, Sackett believed that engineering extension services were the means by which the College’s resources could be spread throughout the state, and he was an early proponent of radio as a tool of extension. He was also deeply involved in athletics. At various times he served as a member of the Board of Athletic Control, as chairman of the Faculty Senate Committee on Athletics, and as Penn State’s faculty representative to the NCAA. It is possible that his twin interests in football and radio were a factor in Penn State’s early commitment to athletic broadcasts.

Radio and Football

Nowhere were the possibilities of radio more tangible than in athletics. Although financial shortfalls largely idled the station in the fall of 1923, the one exception was Penn State

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601 J.O. Keller, “History of the Pennsylvania State College Station WPSC,” April 22, 1936. Vice President for Student Affairs, A 67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, PSULSC.
602 When radio broadcasting ended at Penn State, Crossley continued to participate in amateur radio. The college affiliated station, W8YA, which he operated was the official U.S. Army contact with Admiral Byrd’s 1934-35 expedition to Antarctica. In 1947, his amateur station was the primary contact between the U.S. and Norwegian governments and Thor Heyerdahl’s “Kon-Tiki” expedition which sailed in a raft from Peru to the Polynesian Islands. See: Gilbert L. Crossley. Biographical Vertical Files, ABVF Crossley, Gilbert L., PSULSC.
football. Play-by-play coverage of the Navy and Georgia Tech football games was broadcast “with great success directly from the press box at New Beaver Field.” It is not clear who might have been receiving those early sports broadcasts, but a trial program conducted in the fall of 1923 discovered listeners “in all parts of Pennsylvaniana” along with neighboring states and locales as distant as Bath, Maine and western Kentucky. That same year, Penn State had an opportunity to take part in an early experiment in media interactivity. According to the New York Times, the Superintendent of the Naval Academy approved a midshipman’s plan to transmit the cheers and singing of Navy students in Annapolis to Beaver Field for the Penn State-Navy game on October 20th. The scheme involved placing an amplifier at the Annapolis location where an entire regiment of midshipman would be listening to the game. Their cheers would be picked up and transmitted to a receiver at Penn State which would “send the yells and songs across the playing field” provided Penn State officials had no objections. Although no reference to this was found in Penn State’s archives and no follow up mention was made in the New York Times, Jack Clary noted in his 1997 history of Navy football that the midshipmen indeed “used their budding technology of radio” to transmit their vocal support from Annapolis to Beaver Stadium.

According to the alumni magazine, regular broadcasting began in January of 1924 with programs slated for each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings at 8 p.m. Unlike other rural land-grant schools that drew upon state and federal Departments of Agriculture for programming, Penn State relied primarily on its own faculty and students and favored more entertainment-oriented productions. On Monday evenings, a “Farm and Garden” program was

aimed at rural residents. A general lecture series occupied Wednesday evenings, and Fridays ushered in the weekend with performances by student orchestras, glee clubs, quartets, soloists, dramatists, and especially dance music by student bands. The programming format appeared to meet with the approval of listeners. According to one student operator, each program elicited from 50 to 90 letters and once, “even a telegram was received while the program was still in progress.”

Perhaps the most popular broadcast in the spring of 1924 was the first “Penn State Radio Night.” Created specifically for and promoted to Penn State alumni around the country, the broadcast extravaganza featured music by Penn State groups and informal talks by deans, coaches, and President Thomas. Although the weather on that April evening was not ideal for radio transmission, the broadcast was heard up and down the east coast, throughout the Midwest and into Canada. Applause cards and letters poured into the station after the event. Other than those who could not tune in due to interference from other stations operating on a similar wavelength, the responses were uniformly positive. “At first it seemed impossible that you could be there,” wrote one alumnus from St. Joseph d’Alma in Quebec. “Now, with the Alma Mater echoing through my head once more, it seems impossible that I can be here in the bush, and so far from Penn State. The entire program of music and talks…was thoroughly enjoyed.”

As WPAB signed off for the summer recess, the Public Information Director declared the first season of radio to have been an unqualified success with confirmed reports of broadcasts reaching all but six U.S. states. “Penn State is one of the few colleges in the country that maintains [sic] regular broadcasting from its own station,” the PI director boasted.

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608 Ibid.
609 George S. Wickizer, “Historical Notes: Penn State Radio, 1922-25,” March 13, 1975. MSVF Wickizer, George S., PSULSC.
611 “For the Radio Editor, May 28 1924,” Vice President for Student Affairs, A 67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, PSULSC.
The commercial industry’s burgeoning control of radio became apparent in June of 1924 while WPAB was on hiatus for the summer recess. The patent battles that had resumed following World War I had recently been settled. Penn State’s Dean of Engineering R.L. Sackett reported to President Thomas that the American Telephone and Telegraph Company now controlled the radio telephone patents. The company was seeking a nominal one dollar license fee from Penn State along with the College’s agreement not to purchase broadcast apparatus from competitors. In a letter addressed to one of the engineering professors, the executive assistant for the Bell Telephone Company of Pennsylvania, an AT&T subsidiary, said that his company did not care what equipment the college used for experimental purposes, but for broadcast, WPAB was obliged to use only the equipment provided by AT&T or other “non-infringing apparatus purchased on the open market or constructed in your laboratories.”

Although Sackett expressed wariness about potential legal complications, he advised President Thomas to sign the agreement. “We have the option of being licensed by them, fighting their authority or going out of business, Sackett told the president who relayed the message to Board of Trustees President, John Franklin Shields. Thomas was inclined to challenge AT&T. In correspondence with the Bell Telephone executive, A.W. Lincoln, Thomas requested several modifications to the licensing agreement that he believed would clarify the legalities of the contract. Shields encouraged Thomas to confront AT&T, arguing that future misunderstandings might be eliminated by clarifying exactly what Lincoln was offering and what was merely “an inducement to a contract.” Within a week, Thomas received Lincoln’s reply. AT&T would not make any of the suggested changes to the licensing agreement. “It may be of interest that the identical form has been signed by a large number of colleges throughout the United States,

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612 R.L. Sackett to John M. Thomas, 6 June 1924. PPI Central Files, AI/02.07, Contracts and Agreements, PSULSC.
Lincoln responded. Thomas appeared to be taken aback by the curt reply. “There is a suggestion of a tone about this letter which does not seem to be called for,” he wrote to Shields,613 who agreed that Lincoln was “something of a ‘smart aleck.'”614 In the end, Thomas had little choice but to sign the agreement. Both Dean Sackett and Professor Kinslow in the Engineering Department had encouraged him to agree to AT&T’s terms. Although they were aware that the contract might limit their research options, they were more concerned with not jeopardizing their department’s lucrative corporate relations. Sackett reminded Thomas that AT&T, Western Electric, and Bell Telephone had donated equipment which, along with a gift from the General Electric Company, amounted to $11,000.615 Although the amount may have been insignificant to the corporations who made contributions, it was vital enough to Penn State’s work that researchers did not want to rock the boat. Lest Thomas did not get the message, Sackett added, “The attitude of the corporation is extremely cordial toward this institution.” Thomas did not pursue the matter further.

The contract he signed committed the station to broadcasting only “in furtherance of its purposes,” and it expressly forbade Penn State to operate “directly or indirectly for toll or hire.”616 So Penn State was free to broadcast its football games as part of its educational mandate, but it could not do so for profit. Thomas’ handling of the AT&T issue is instructive because it illustrates an instance in which an administrator provided tentative resistance to a powerful corporation but quickly backed down and accepted a corporate position that offered no measure

613 John M. Thomas to John Franklin Shields, 28 June 1924. PPI Central Files, AI/02.07, Contracts and Agreements, PSULSC.
614 John Franklin Shields to John M. Thomas, 2 July 1924. PPI Central Files, AI/02.07, Contracts and Agreements, PSULSC.
615 R.L. Sackett to John M. Thomas, June 1, 1924. PPI Central Files, AI/02.07, Contracts and Agreements, PSULSC.
616 License Agreement: At&T and Pennsylvania State College, 16 July 1924. PPI Central Files, AI/02.07, Contracts and Agreements, PSULSC.
Thomas’ aggressive response to AT&T, however, should not be interpreted as hostility toward corporate America. In fact, one of the distinctions between Penn State’s approach to radio compared to Wisconsin’s can be seen in the subtly different philosophical underpinnings of each institution. Although Penn State served a broad rural community, Pennsylvania was also one of the nation’s largest industrial states. Much of the college’s extension and research efforts were geared toward the mining, steel-making, and other manufacturing industries in Pennsylvania whose owners sometimes sat on Penn State’s Board of Trustees. In making the case for state support, Penn State administrators drew attention to the role that the College played in the economic betterment of the state. “A college is not a charitable institution,” and Penn State, in particular, “is a very definite factor in the scheme of wealth production,” President Thomas told his Board of Trustees. Like the industries it served, Thomas said, Penn State was “a competitive institution and its survival and substantial growth is dependent upon the value of the service it renders.” To a greater extent than at Ohio State or Wisconsin, Penn State radio was dependent upon industry support for donations of equipment. The Engineering Extension division invited to its annual conventions representatives from AT&T, Westinghouse, Bell Telephone of Pennsylvania, and General Electric, along with representatives from dozens of smaller companies. The preamble to a resolution passed at the 1922 convention which called for more state funding for science and engineering read:

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617 At Wisconsin and Ohio State there is no evidence of presidential involvement in the AT&T issue. At Wisconsin, for example, it was discussed among Wright, Terry, and Bennett. While acknowledging reluctance “to take sides in a controversy” they determined that the ability to purchase Western Electric equipment would be an overwhelming convenience. See: C.A. Wright to E.M. Terry, 19 June 1924. WHA Radio and Television 41/06/02-4, Box 1, General Correspondence, Folder 005: Equipment and Blueprints: P-Z, Steenbock Library. C.A. Wright to Edward Bennett, June 13 1924. WHA Radio and Television, 41/06/02-4, General Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 005: Equipment and Blueprints: P-Z, Steenbock Library.

618 "Everything 'Broadcastable,'" *Penn State Alumni News*, Vol. 14, No. 2, November, 1927, p.12. According to this article, the remote control equipment that made sports broadcasting possible was due to contributions from two alumni who were working for Western Electric and one from the Hazard Manufacturing Company in Wilkes-Barre.
The investigation of scientific problems is a necessary function of a state institution. Many small industries are unable to equip and operate a laboratory for the study of some new product or new process or invention. It is generally recognized as the proper function of the State to help its citizens and its industries in the development of new sources of wealth.\footnote{Report of the School of Engineering to the President of the Penn State College for the Year Ending June 30, 1922.} 

By contrast, Wisconsin was influenced by the agrarian populist movements of the Midwest that had favored farm cooperatives to challenge the predatory monopolies of bankers and industrial agriculture. The Progressives, who were the heirs to the populist agrarians, had enormous faith in the capacity of government to manage public welfare—in part, by checking the power of corporations in order to free individuals from the grip of monopolies.\footnote{Authors preface. David P. Thelen, \textit{Robert La Follette and the Insurgent Spirit} (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1976), viii.} In light of these different foundational bases, Wisconsin became a champion of non-commercial radio, financed by the state, while Penn State was more inclined to view the decline of its own radio station as the less fit loser in a Darwinian struggle for survival.

\textbf{Big-Time Football}

By 1926, football had given Penn State the national exposure that Thomas had craved.\footnote{There is a discrepancy in the records concerning some of the milestones in WPAB’s early history. In 1936, J. Orvis Keller, the head of Extension, completed a history of the station which was submitted to S.E. Frost, Jr. for publication in his book, \textit{Education’s Own Stations}. Although the events described appear to be accurate accounts, some of the dates do not correspond with other extant sources. For example, Keller’s history, which appears almost verbatim in the Frost book, states that no funds were available from 1923 to 1925, and that consequently, there were few broadcasts. However, other sources, including the student newspaper, the \textit{New York Times}, the \textit{Penn State Alumni News Magazine} and the \textit{Penn State Engineering News}—which were written at the time of the broadcasts and did not rely on decade’s old memories—carry schedules and detailed descriptions of programming from 1924. In addition, “applause cards” and other forms of listener feedback in the archives support the fact that Penn State had a limited but regular and varied broadcast schedule throughout 1924. Finally, the public information director sent out weekly press releases in 1924. Although the archives do not contain every weekly release, the content of those that exist convey a sense of regularity. By contrast, there is almost no mention of radio in 1925 and...} Nationally noted teams were on Penn State’s schedule, and some had even begun to travel to
central Pennsylvania. “The attendance at the Notre Dame game in 1926 surpassed anything at State College in previous years,” according to an Athletic Report submitted to the Board of Trustees which also noted that football had shown a profit of nearly $50,000.622

The number of radio listeners may have risen as well. The station resumed football broadcasts under the call letters WPSC which the Commerce Department had assigned at the request of Penn State officials in order to solidify the link between radio and the college. An allotment of $700 had enabled Crossley to rebuild the transmitter in order to increase power, and an alumni gift of 600 feet of lead covered cable and other equipment was used to install an underground connection between the radio transmitter and both the football field and the auditorium.623

The football team’s rise to prominence in the post-war years, capped by an appearance in the 1923 Rose Bowl, had fed an appetite for winning, particularly among alumni. But the rise to big-time status had brought some unwelcome attention as well. As at other schools across the country, faculty were beginning to question the possibly deleterious effect of intercollegiate athletics on academics, and as the pressure to win increased, coaches and athletes engaged in questionable practices that challenged the amateur principles collegiate athletes claimed to hold dear. Aware that the NCAA had requested that the Carnegie Commission undertake a study on intercollegiate athletics, Penn State initiated its own investigation in hopes of deflecting inevitable criticism.624 One of the issues that ultimately emerged from the self-assessment had particular relevance to radio—football fans. An analysis that followed the Carnegie Report

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622 Report on Department of Physical Education and Athletics, January 18 1926. Board of Trustees Supporting Papers, Group 6, Box 17, AR04.04, PSULSC.
624 Howard J. Savage et al., American College Athletics (New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1929). Penn State’s president submitted a written statement to the investigators in advance of the report’s publication, noting that although 75 “Trustee athletic scholarships” had been awarded in 1926, the practice had been phased out and the Board of Athletic Control had decreed that no new scholarships would be given. See p.256.
concluded that “over-emphasis on the interests of spectators…have caused many of the major problems and evils….Suggestions have been made that the only way to remove such evils is to eliminate spectator interest.”\textsuperscript{625} The analysis went on to note that while Penn State depended on a moderate income from game attendance it did not need large gate receipts for its athletic program to stay solvent as some universities did.\textsuperscript{626} To the extent that the College catered to spectators, it should be primarily concerned with students and faculty, according to the analysis, and only secondarily with the general public including alumni.\textsuperscript{627} The report did not mention radio, yet broadcasting of football games might have served as a means to the end—creating the communities of loyal listeners that would support the college while not requiring a colossal stadium that would accommodate more fans and raise the level of spectacle.\textsuperscript{628} As a general statement of policy, the report appeared to reflect a retreat from Thomas’ desire to catapult Penn State to the ranks of nationally-known universities. That retreat was in keeping with the cautious and conservative approach of Ralph Dorn Hetzel who took the helm at Penn State in 1927 and quietly abandoned efforts to transform Penn State College into a university.\textsuperscript{629}

\textsuperscript{626} To give some idea of what was meant by “moderate,” according to the 1925 Annual Report of the Athletic Advisory Committee, football made a profit of $49,292.60 in 1924.
\textsuperscript{628} Just one year later, however, the Board of Athletic Control would report a falling off of more than $20,000 in receipts for all sports as football brought in less money while the minor sports lost more money. However, as the Alumni News Magazine reported in December of 1927, the scheduling of a game with Notre Dame to be played in Philadelphia the following year, “the present deficit will be eliminated during the year 1928-29.”
\textsuperscript{629} Michael Bezilla, \textit{Penn State: An Illustrated History} (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1985), p.137.
The Hetzel Era

Although there is relatively little evidence of Hetzel’s involvement with radio at Penn State, there are indications that he valued the new medium. In his Inaugural Address, he summarized the history of land-grant institutions. He noted that the function that distinguished them from other academies of higher education was their commitment to the “wide dissemination of information among the people.” Echoing the “Wisconsin Idea,” Hetzel proclaimed that “no longer were the campus boundaries to coincide with the campus fences.”

Perhaps, most telling is that he chaired the Special Radio Committee of the Land Grant Association that had been appointed in response to the unease of educational broadcasters over the intentions of commercial operators and the government. In November of 1927, Hetzel reported back to the Association that educational broadcasters faced three challenges: to win recognition from the FRC that land-grant institutions, as legally constituted agencies of the state, had the right to broadcast information to the citizenry; to develop a system of program exchanges among land-grant institutions; and in general, to safeguard and advance the interests of educational broadcasters.

Hetzel also sought to survey the efforts underway specifically at land-grant colleges and universities. The FRC was already perceived by many educational broadcasters as attempting to “clear the field,” and some institutions, particularly those serving rural populations, looked to Hetzel’s committee to present to the FRC the “difficulties that Land Grant stations are experiencing,” according to the secretary of the Special Radio Committee.

Another indication of Hetzel’s interest in radio is the fact that WPSC received its first regular budget allotment in June, 1927. The $2,000 allocation, coupled with Crossley’s

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630 Inaugural Address, 14 June 1927. Ralph D. Hetzel Papers, Group 48, Box 9, Commencement Materials and Inaugural Addresses, PSULSC.
632 T.B. Symons to George W. Rightmire, 13 December 1927. George W. Rightmire Papers, RG 3/f-7/50, Broadcasting Station: Correspondence and Broadcasts, TOSUA.
engineering talent, enabled the station to install a modern transmitter that, according to Keller, would have cost more than seven times as much if purchased commercially. While radio existed at Penn State, it was provided for each year under Hetzel. However, as Keller noted, the allocations were “sufficient only to maintain and operate the transmitter without major improvements.” Finally, Hetzel’s own use of radio suggests that he understood its communicative value. Just three months into his administration he made a radio address to the alumni of Penn State on WPSC. And he did not confine himself to his own station. While in Pittsburgh for the annual football game with Pitt, he gave a promotional talk on Penn State’s contribution to the sciences on KDKA. His KDKA broadcast became an annual event. The following year, he took to the airwaves of WIP in Philadelphia to urge voters to support a state constitutional amendment that would require the state to issue bonds to insure adequate funding for Pennsylvania’s land-grant institution. Despite such evidence of Hetzel’s involvement with radio, he revealed no sense of urgency as the FRC turned up the pressure. It is likely that once the Depression set in, Hetzel had more pressing concerns such as keeping the college functional. The history of radio at Penn State from late 1927 to 1932 is one of constant demands from the FRC, continual struggles by Crossley and Kinsloe to meet the ever-shifting requirements, and silence on the issue from Hetzel.

633 J.O. Keller, “History of the Pennsylvania State College Station WPSC,” April 22, 1936. Vice President for Student Affairs, A 67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, PSULSC.
634 Ibid.
636 “Greetings from President Hetzel,” 23 November 1927. Ralph D. Hetzel Papers, Group 48, Box 2, Series 5-42 Addresses: Athletics, Group 48/Box 2, PSULSC.
637 Ralph D. Hetzel, "Radio Talk, Station WIP," 19 October 1928. Ralph D. Hetzel Papers, Group 48, Box 2, Series 5-53: Alumni Addresses, PSULSC.
FRC Challenges

With the creation of the FRC, a barrage of new hurdles was added to Crossley’s workload at WPSC. In April of 1927, the newly-created agency renewed WPSC’s license on a full-time basis and on a frequency of 1150 kilocycles. Just two months later, when the station applied for renewal as mandated by the FRC, it was assigned to a lower frequency and ordered to share time with the station operated by the state police barracks, WBAK, in the state capital of Harrisburg.638 Aware that the FRC favored stations that could make the most use of their allotted air time, WPSC stepped up its programming efforts. “Everything that is ‘broadcastable’ in the line of campus events is now being put on the air,” the alumni magazine boasted.639 The remote control locations of most value, according to the article, were those in Schwab Auditorium and on the football field where Larry Conover, a member of the coaching staff, provided play-by-play game coverage. A schedule from a week in November of 1927 confirms the varied programming that could be heard five days a week once chapel services began airing in October. Programming included a Penn State vs. British Student Union debate on co-education, Sackett’s lecture on George Westinghouse, baritone solos and mandolin performances, and Penn State versus New York University football.640 The alumni magazine article noted that the Board of Trustees had approved funds to rebuild the station to conform to the new specifications of the FRC. In addition to equipment upgrades, the studio had been remodeled, according to the alumni news magazine:

The walls are covered with symmetrical blocks of acoustic celotex, the best material for deadening sound that could be procured; a heavy rug fills the entire floor space; and windows and doors are artistically draped with dark blue velour with white curtains. Windsor chairs and tables complete the furnishings of this strictly up-to-date studio.641

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640 “Radio Programs for the Week of Nov. 6, 1927.” Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs, A 67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, PSULSC.
The optimism concerning radio was soon dashed, however. The following month, the FRC assigned WPSC and WBAK to share time during the day, with both stations signing off by 7:30 p.m. to provide a clear channel for commercial broadcasters in St. Louis and Asheville, North Carolina. Since the Monday and Wednesday evening programs had aired at 8 p.m., and the Friday program had aired from 7 to 10 p.m., the FRC directive made a shambles of WPSC’s schedule. The daylight broadcast order took effect on December 1st, leaving Kinsloe to abridge his evening programs so that they would fit into a 6:30-7 p.m. time slot. But that was just the beginning. In less than a year, WPSC’s frequency was changed again, and by November of 1928, the station’s time was reduced to daytime only. There can be little doubt that the FRC orders handicapped the station. For a brief period in mid-1927, the commission had upped the power allotment of WPSC from 250 to 500 watts, allowing it to get “into cities now where before it was impossible to penetrate because of local conditions.” Still at that power level the following year, the alumni magazine reported that “many alumni have written to the station officials in appreciation of the Saturday afternoon broadcasts of athletic events during the fall and winter, for all of these were broadcast.” Yet with subsequent reductions in power and changes in channel assignment, little mention of the station is found in either the radio archives or the alumni magazine.

Other educational broadcasters also were being taxed by FRC demands to defend their licenses and justify their time assignments. In October of 1930, U.S. Commissioner of Education William John Cooper convened the meeting of educational broadcasters in Chicago that led to creation of the NCER. Kinsloe represented Penn State. Upon his return, he shared with the radio

643 J.O. Keller, “History of the Pennsylvania State College Station WPSC,” April 22, 1936. Vice President for Student Affairs, A 67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, PSULSC.
staff the consensus that had emerged: Commercial broadcasters were so firmly entrenched that they would soon have a monopoly of the airwaves; the FRC could not be counted upon for support; and the solution was that a fixed percentage of channels must be reserved for educators—the proposal that became known as the Fess Bill. Keller was appointed to the NCER as the representative of the National University Extension Association, a position he retained even after broadcasting ended at Penn State.646

In the meantime, the Depression had taken its toll on Penn State and drawn away any lingering interest that Hetzel or the Board of Trustees may have had in radio. In Keller’s account, the governing board was hesitant to invest its increasingly scarce dollars in radio because of uncertainty over what demands the FRC would make next.647 It seemed likely that the FRC would continue to insist on full use of assigned time. For Penn State, as for other universities, this was problematic because the station typically shut down during the summer months and in the semester breaks when its student operators and the student talent were unavailable. Although the radio staff was willing to keep the station operating on a more nearly full-time basis, Board of Trustee members were unwilling to support more extensive programming “in the face of the many more concrete and exact needs which were constantly pressed upon the college,” Keller said.648 Taking a cue from Wisconsin and Ohio, Keller had proposed a Pennsylvania School of the Air that would operate in partnership with state agencies. A bill to that effect was introduced into the legislature in 1931, but quietly died.649 The measure was probably too little too late, yet it serves to underscore Penn State’s inability to rally political support for its causes at the state level. Unlike the situation at Ohio State and Wisconsin, Penn State officials did not have regular

646 J.O. Keller, “History of the Pennsylvania State College Station WPSC,” April 22, 1936. Vice President for Student Affairs, A 67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, PSULSC.
647 Ibid.
648 Ibid.
649 According to Keller’s account, the measure was House Bill 1773 in the Pennsylvania legislature, and it was not reported out of committee for unspecified reasons, however no mention of the bill was found in the records of the Pennsylvania state legislature or through the PA Sessions Law Project.
and easy access to lawmakers and governors. Although Hetzel frequently spoke in public about the obligation of the State to fund the land-grant institutions, he was not willing to play the political games that might have given him insider status. As one example, in 1930, he refused Governor Gifford Pinchot’s request that he chair a Committee on Unemployment. Although he cited his health as a reason, he also noted that the timing of the governor’s request—a month before the general election—would “subject me to the charge that I was involving the institution in partisan politics” which “would be harmful to your cause as well as to my own public trust.”

This was far different than the cozy relationship that existed between Wisconsin lawmakers and faculty and administrators who were often involved in government efforts where they could lend their expertise and leadership skills. Certainly, the supportive relationship that Wisconsin and Ohio State presidents had enjoyed with their Attorney Generals did not characterize Hetzel’s ties to Pennsylvania’s Attorney General. In 1932, Hetzel issued a scathing indictment of the Attorney General for supporting state appropriations to Penn State that amounted to a reduction of more than fifty percent of the funds previously appropriated to the College. While expressing his willingness to economize in tough economic times, Hetzel said the Attorney General’s ruling was “unnecessarily destructive” and “would do injury which would be almost beyond repair.”

One can only speculate on how the Attorney General would have ruled had Hetzel accepted the governor’s assignment 18 months earlier.

Throughout the turmoil, football coverage was one of the constants of the broadcast schedule. According to Ridge Riley, Crossley tapped a student, Kenneth L. Holderman, to provide the play-by-play and “color” in 1928. Holderman, who later became a trustee, was at the

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650 Ralph D. Hetzel to Gifford Pinchot, 2 October 1930. Ralph Dorn Hetzel Papers, Group 48, Box 3, Series 6-24, Correspondence: Penn State Period 1930, PSULSC.
651 “Press Release,” 25 May 1932. Historical Data: Presidents, Hetzel, PSUA/10358, Group 3.01, Box 1, PSULSC.
microphone for home football games until his graduation in 1931.\textsuperscript{652} Determined to adapt to whatever the FRC required, Kinsloe restructured the broadcast schedule to make the most of its limited hours. Since the Sunday chapel services had proved to be quite popular, a new series of Sunday afternoon programs were added that featured student musical offerings, dramatic sketches, and five-minute faculty lectures. Afternoon programs of music and lectures were moved to a 4 p.m. starting time.\textsuperscript{653} Perhaps in an effort to furnish proof of the service it was providing to the public, the station undertook a listener survey in 1931. In an article that appeared in the alumni news magazine and was distributed by the Agriculture and Engineering Extension services, the station’s Director of Radio Programs frankly admitted that it had become “very apparent that unless we used our privileges and rendered a service commensurate with the position which had been given us, the Federal Radio Commission would remove us from the air.” He described what was apparently the station’s last-ditch effort to fill its time slots with more than 12 hours of programming per week. The survey, he noted, was intended to assess where WPSC’s programs were being heard and what listeners thought of the technical quality and content of the programs.\textsuperscript{654} It is doubtful that the survey was actually intended to illicit much in the way of meaningful program feedback because the response form that listeners were asked to return was only 2 ½ by 3 inches with small lines on which to reply. In terms of coverage, the survey results indicated that 26 Pennsylvania counties had consistent reception, 17 had fair reception, and 24 had poor or no reception.\textsuperscript{655}

In the summer of 1931, the FRC informed Penn State that after reviewing the latest renewal application the commission was not satisfied that WPSC was operating in the public

\textsuperscript{655} J.O. Keller, “History of the Pennsylvania State College Station WPSC," April 22, 1936. Vice President for Student Affairs, A 67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, PSULSC.
interest, convenience, and necessity. Specifically, the FRC noted that the station had not complied with General Order Nos. 111 and 115 which required yet another round of upgrades of equipment and operating power. An ongoing problem was that Penn State, like many colleges and universities, had a biennial budget, so it was difficult to respond immediately to orders that required funding allocations. In this particular case, Crossley was able to convince the FRC examiner that the failure to heed the orders was a technical matter that the station could resolve. He was not so fortunate with the next FRC demand.

In early 1932, the FRC again threatened to revoke WPSC’s license, this time for failure to comply with General Order No. 97 which required a reconstruction of the station’s transmitter. The National Committee for Education by Radio sent one of its members, Dean H.J. Umberger of the Kansas State Agricultural College, to investigate the problem. Umberger reported back to the committee that both Kinsloe and Hetzel wanted to continue broadcasting, but that General Order No. 97 had been issued at a time when there was no opportunity to secure funds from the legislature so as to comply with the order. Umberger said that Kinsloe planned to ask the FRC for an extension on the deadline for compliance, but the report did not end on a hopeful note:

There is, however, another aspect to this problem. WPSC...is restricted to day-time broadcasting hours. This makes it impossible for Station WPSC to effectively reach a very large part of the state. There is some question therefore as to whether they will be justified in improving their present facilities, since their license is inadequate with respect to power and frequency.

Nonetheless, Kinsloe made the request in February of 1932, which Hetzel relayed to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees. The committee appointed Hetzel and another

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657 Quoted in J.O. Keller, “History of the Pennsylvania State College Station WPSC,” 22 April 1936. Vice President for Student Affairs, A 67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, PSULSC.

658 Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, February 24 1932. Supporting Papers of the Board of Trustees, AR 05.21, Group 6, Box 10, PSULSC.
board member to study the radio broadcasting situation and report back at the next meeting. Their report, delivered two months later, gave Kinsloe the news he dreaded. On April 29th, Hetzel read to the Board of Trustees Executive Committee a letter from the FRC dated six days earlier:

The present license of WPSC expires on June 22, 1932. This expiration date was incorporated in your license due to the fact that the equipment used is not capable of being operated in accordance with the Rule 144….Unless your present transmitter is redesigned so as to conform to all the Commission’s rules or a new transmitter capable of so doing is to be installed, it will not be possible to make a favorable recommendation on your application for renewal.659

Hetzel also presented to the Executive Committee the Radio Committee’s report stating that compliance improvements would cost $20,000, while maintenance of good programs would require an additional $10,000. With no further comment from Hetzel, the Executive Committee voted that the College would not expend the money to meet the FRC’s requirements.660

Still, Kinsloe was not ready to give up. He had recently heard of a new apparatus developed by Western Electric that could bring WPSC into compliance while still allowing it to use its current transmitter. The apparatus would cost roughly $2,700, but Crossley said he could secure it if the radio budget allocation for 1932 could be increased by just $190. (As noted by the Radio Committee chair, and quoted by Keller, that feat would be achieved “by reductions which would mean a personal sacrifice on the part of Mr. Crossley.”)661 Already mired in budget-cutting, Hetzel would not consider any proposal that would entail more spending on radio, particularly when it was impossible to know what additional regulations the FRC would impose next. In June, another member of the Radio Committee informed Hetzel that the cost of the apparatus had actually been found to be $500 less than the previous figure, so that WPSC, in fact, could make the upgrade and continue to operate while staying within its budgetary parameters for

659 “Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees,” 29 April 1932. Board of Trustees Supporting Papers, Group 6,Box 10, AR 05.21, PSULSC.
660 Ibid.
661 J.O. Keller, “History of the Pennsylvania State College Station WPSC,” April 22, 1936. Vice President for Student Affairs, A 67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, PSULSC.
1931-32. Before Hetzel could make a decision, however, the FRC wired the College on June 21st to say that any operation by WPSC after 3 a.m. the next day would be a violation of the 1927 Radio Act. Hetzel wired back: “We protest this demand upon public educational institution at time when public funds are seriously curtailed. In compliance with your telegram we have ceased our broadcast.”

Upon receiving Hetzel’s reply, the Commission appeared to have relented the quick action and agreed to hold a hearing on August 22nd to reconsider the renewal of WPSC. The NCER offered to testify at the hearing and to ask the FRC to give permission to WPSC to take a break from broadcasting until the economic situation improved. Hetzel, however, was apparently worn down by the FRC. He refused the NCER’s offer, and he did not send a representative to the August hearing. On August 29th, the FRC officially turned down Penn State’s renewal application. Two months later, Broadcasting magazine marked the end of a once promising radio station with a single sentence. WPSC was denied renewal of its license “for violations of regulations and failure to operate in the public interest.”

Early the next year, the Commission notified Penn State that a station in Lancaster had applied for WPSC’s frequency. Penn State made no protest. Thus, radio broadcasting at Penn State came to an end, not to resume until 1953 when the FCC granted the College a license to operate a low-powered FM station, WDFM, “primarily as a teaching instrument and as a means of facilitating student-to-student communication.”

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662 “Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees,” 29 April 1932. Board of Trustees Supporting Papers, AR05.21, Group 6, Box 10, PSULSC.
664 J.O. Keller, “History of the Pennsylvania State College Station WPSC," April 22, 1936. Vice President for Student Affairs, A 67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, PSULSC.
665 Radio at Penn State, n.d. J.O. Keller, Vice President for Student Affairs, A 67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, PSULSC.
Commercial Broadcasts

Outside interest in Penn State football remained even after radio was gone. Without broadcasters, sports reporters reverted to more primitive technology. The copy written in the press box at Beaver Field was transmitted by telegraph from the State College Western Union office to various newsrooms for publication the next day. Meanwhile, other colleges and universities were turning over their athletic broadcasts to commercial operators. Penn State had opportunities. In 1936, the Morris Newmark Company approached the College with an advertising deal. In exchange for advertising a brand of coffee, Penn State would receive a percentage of the profits. It is not clear whether the offer involved radio sponsorship, but because it was discussed at a meeting of the Senate Committee on Athletics it most likely concerned advertising in some relationship to football games. According to the meeting minutes, “The profit was considered, and it was moved and passed unanimously that the College should not accept a commercial proposal of this nature.”

No record of the discussions leading up to the first commercial contract could be found, but the year was 1938. In a letter addressed to the attention of Ridge Riley, then a member of the Public Information staff, the vice president of N.W. Ayer & Son advertising company outlined the terms of a radio sponsorship agreement. For $1,500, Penn State agreed to give the Atlantic Refining Company exclusive broadcasting privileges for the entire series of home football games. Additionally, Penn State agreed to install “adequate broadcasting facilities” upon the request of the sponsor and to co-operate in securing broadcast rights for Atlantic Refining for away games. Penn State agreed that Atlantic Refining could mention its broadcasts of Penn State football in all

667 “Minutes of Meeting of Senate Committee on Athletics,” 14 March 1936. Intercollegiate Athletic Records, Group 4.01, Box 1, AJ 06.12, Senate Committee on Athletics: 1931-1945, PSULSC.
668 It is not clear whether Atlantic Refining requested any addition facilities, but according to Riley’s history, in 1938, the stadium acquired a public-address system, an electric scoreboard and timer, and a steel fence to enclose the stadium. See: Road to Number One, p. 278.
its advertising and promotional materials. And finally, Penn State granted to Atlantic Refining the first option of purchasing the home football schedule for 1939. The game that administrators had lauded for its spirit of amateurism had been sold in bulk to a gas company.

Two more decades would pass before Penn State would get back into radio broadcasting. In 1953, the FCC licensed WDFM to Penn State as a part-time, non-commercial station. Still demonstrating an alternative “American Way,” the station was funded by a twenty cent fee on all undergraduates that was matched by a University allocation of $3,000 for instructional programming. However, the deck continued to be stacked against educational radio. First, a dearth of FM receivers meant that relatively few listeners could pick up the broadcasts. Second, a plan to apply for a newly available AM frequency was squashed in part because the only local station in the area threatened to file suit against the University. Third, FCC regulations required that “the station must in no way restrict the broadcasting of University events by commercial stations or network,” a provision that gave commercial operators ready access to Penn State football—the only University event in which most commercial broadcasters were interested.

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669 N.W. Ayer Vice President to Ridge Riley, 1 June 1938. PPI Central Files A1/02.07, Contracts and Agreements, PSULSC

670 Radio at Penn State, n.d. Vice President for Student Affairs, A67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, p.6, PSULSC.

671 Ibid. See pp. 7, 9, and 11.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

Every university president bemoans the ‘overemphasis’ upon football; and every stadium in the Big Ten was built on the recommendation of the president around whose neck it is now hanging. 672

Robert Hutchins
University of Chicago President
1936

At the start of the 1920s, amateurism was the professed ideal in intercollegiate athletics and public interest was the guiding principle in radio. By the end of the 1930s, a decade marked by economic depression and expanded government intervention in public welfare, intercollegiate sports and radio were big businesses that were poised to continue growing. The tenets of amateurism and public interest were not abandoned per se; rather, they were subtly and gradually redefined by legislators, regulators, and leaders in radio and athletics in a way that supported the dominant political and economic systems. Henceforth, success in both electronic media and college athletics would be measured to a large extent by a ratings system that rewarded those who could command the largest audiences. The evolution of that philosophical shift is apparent when viewed through the microcosm of intercollegiate sports broadcasting at land-grant institutions where the controversies over radio and college sports intersected.

The debate over broadcasting of intercollegiate athletics in the 1920s and 1930s was part of a broader battle between the radio industry and educational broadcasters. In turn, that struggle reflected competing political and economic ideologies regarding the role of government in modern society. Media historians have explored the role of legislators, government regulators, and the radio industry in forging a broadcast system that supported the status quo and which was

presented to the American public as the only feasible option in a capitalist democracy. This study found that the “consensus” that emerged for an “American way” of broadcasting was abetted by athletic officials and administrators in higher education who undermined their own campus radio stations through cooperation with or acquiescence to the commercial radio industry in permitting the commodification of broadcasts of intercollegiate athletics. Their actions, or sometimes inertia, in the face of challenges to educational radio, can be attributed to several factors: administrators appreciated the value of publicity in creating communities of supporters for their institutions; radio directors felt an obligation to taxpayers to make sports broadcasts at state-supported schools widely available; and some athletic personnel held an abiding belief in competition as the only basis for measuring and assessing worth. They did not disavow educational radio, but in their rhetoric they linked the vigor, discipline, and strenuous efforts displayed on the football field to a capitalistic system that likewise esteemed competition as a natural and necessary way of doing business. Further, both the personal correspondence and public speeches of athletic and administrative officials reveal an underlying fear of socialism at a time when economic calamity, shifting demographics, and political uncertainty posed serious challenges to the status quo.

In spite of the factors that encouraged the use of commercial radio by higher education, there was resistance to commercialization within the campus community. To varying degrees, each of the case studies in this dissertation found evidence of conflicts between two groups in higher education regarding radio. On one side were the faculty and staff who created and nurtured radio on land-grant campuses. They perceived the medium’s importance as a vehicle of outreach and defined its public interest standard primarily by its capacity to deliver educational, informational, and entertainment programming to residents of the state in the tradition of agricultural extension. In addition, radio was seen as an electronic town hall that could keep rural communities informed of and engaged in public policy debates. Wisconsin’s Program Director William Lighty articulated this role for radio when he said that “modern democratic civilization is
based upon the assumption that men and women not only have developed their intelligence, but they keep themselves intelligent and discriminatively poised and abreast of the times throughout life.”673 Finally, radio was a means of creating, in Benedict Anderson’s term, “imagined communities” of listeners—strangers who could develop bonds with one another and with their land-grant institution through the airwaves.674 Perhaps no programming was more important than athletics at building that sense of shared identity. And in the early years of educational radio, no programming appeared to be as popular with the public.

Influence of Athletics

On the other side of the debate were athletic officials, including the influential Commissioner of the Big Ten Major John L. Griffith. Intercollegiate football had become a big business by the 1920s, and coaches and athletic directors at big-time football schools tended to view radio from the standpoint of how it could benefit or harm their programs. They adjusted their rhetoric to suit their purposes. When radio appeared to pose a threat to game attendance in the early years of the Great Depression, conferences moved to ban broadcasts. They maintained that they needed to protect the gate receipts which financed the non-revenue generating sports. They also noted that radio broadcasts had a negative impact on attendance at the games of smaller schools where many football fans chose to stay at home and listen to the big games on radio rather than watching a less important contest. Once it was determined that radio did not hurt their revenue—and perhaps helped it through publicity—big-time football schools embraced broadcasting as a public service to those who were unable to be at the field on game day. The

673 Adult Education, November 1927. William Lighty Papers, Box 29, WSHS.
problems of smaller schools were no longer their concern. By their logic, they were simply giving
the public what it wanted.

Athletic officials did not display any antagonism toward educational broadcasters. Wisconsin’s athletic department may have simply ignored WHA while making its own
arrangements for broadcasting. Penn State’s athletic personnel welcomed WPSC’s coverage, in
part, because no commercial station had expressed an interest in Nittany Lion sports. Coach and
Physical Education Director Hugo Bezdek was a periodic guest on WPSC where he delivered
lectures on topics such as mass athletics and the role of athletics on campus. At Ohio State,
Athletic Director St. John and WOSU’s director Higgy had a close professional relationship and
worked together to provide sports broadcasting of Buckeye football. Athletic directors, however,
saw little value in limiting their sports broadcasts to their educational stations. Concerned
primarily with gaining recognition for their teams, they generally welcomed commercial radio
into their broadcast booths. In doing so, they missed an opportunity to underscore football’s
educational meaning. At a time when reformers were criticizing football’s outsized role on
campus and the exalted position occupied by coaches and players, athletic directors added to the
perception of football as a separate and profit-oriented endeavor by aligning it both rhetorically
and in practice with the commercial industry.

Extant correspondence among athletic directors of the Big Ten also suggests that athletic
personnel were sympathetic to commercial broadcasting because they believed that capitalism
and democracy were two sides of the same coin, and one was not possible without the other. The
election of Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 had ushered in a new era of unprecedented government

675 “Radio Program for Friday, February 22: Hugo Bezdek-the Place of Athletics in College Life,”
1924. Vice President for Student Affairs, A67, Box 28: Campus Radio Stations, PSULSC.
676 There can be little doubt of the sincerity of many athletic officials that sports had an obvious
educational value. In 1933, Griffith asked the Big Ten athletic directors for ideas on how to assess the
educational value of individual sports as a means of determining which might be subject to elimination in
the Depression era. See: John L. Griffith to the Directors of Athletics of the Conference, Memorandum:
The Survival Values of Intercollegiate Sports, 30 August 1933. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10,
Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith and St. John), 1933, TOSUA.
intervention in business, industry, and social welfare. Resentful of Roosevelt’s policies and prone
to nativist fears, men such as Griffith and Ohio State Athletic Director Lynn St. John felt besieged
by the currents of change. Worried that misguided bureaucrats would attempt to equalize the
playing fields through regulation or reform, they responded, in part, by situating football within a
panoply of traditional American values and emphasizing its relationship to the status quo. In a
letter to Big Ten coaches, Griffith pointed to “decadent Europe” as a vague example of where
Roosevelt’s policies might lead, and recommended sports as the antidote. “Through our athletic
programs, we can help to inculcate in our boys the American spirit,” Griffith stated. “We can
refuse to be influenced by the soft idealists.”677 At Penn State, an alumni member of the Athletic
Association was even more explicit. He suggested an emphasis on athletics because “industry in
general is desirous of securing graduates who have had the experience and training of competitive
sports as they are better prepared to stand the competition they encounter in the industrial
field.”678

The personal communication between St. John and Griffith offers an important window
into the thinking that guided the Big Ten, arguably the most influential football conference in the
nation. Griffith privately dismissed the 1929 Carnegie Report, which had attacked the abuses and
corruption of college sports, as a product of eastern institutions that were jealous of the Big Ten.
He also minimized the report in public. Speaking to the State Teachers Association just a month
after the report was issued he said that “in a democracy such as ours we are apt to place a
premium on mediocrity and to be suspicious of men, organizations and activities which are highly

677 John Griffith to Directors of Athletics of the Conference, 27 June 1938. Director of Athletics,
RG 9/e-1/9 Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner, Correspondence, 1937-38, TOSUA.
678 Quoted in “Athletic Advisory Board Minutes,” 15 January 1938. Group 4.01, Box 1.AJ06.12,
PSULSC.
successful.” Obviously, the power and success of corporate radio networks would not deter Griffith from the commercial airwaves.

**Influence of Administrators**

Straddling the divide between radio and athletics were the administrators at land-grant institutions. The three main presidents in these case studies were uniformly supportive of educational radio although to different degrees. Of the three, Wisconsin’s Glenn Frank was by far the most vocal promoter of educational radio. He arrived at Wisconsin in the mid-1920s with a progressive agenda that favored state support of public institutions as a check on the growing reach and power of monopolies. A frequent critic of capitalism, Frank supported a ban on gifts from educational foundations (although he later changed his position) because he viewed such largesse as attempts to permeate higher education with a corporate capitalist creed. Frank was actively involved in creating WHA’s unique economic model in which the station functioned as a partner of state agencies. He sat on the advisory board to WHA where he oversaw the development of many innovative shows, including political affairs programming.

George Rightmire and Ralph Hetzel played less prominent roles at their respective institutions in regard to radio. Both supported allocation of funds but did not get involved in policy debates. On the few occasions when Rightmire took more forceful action, such as traveling to Washington, DC to testify at FRC hearings, it was generally at the prodding of one of the radio committee members. Hetzel might have been expected to take a more hands-on approach to radio. He was involved on the national level in the effort to secure reservations of channels. He headed the Special Radio Committee in the Land Grant Association that was charged with responding to

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679 John L. Griffith, “Address before the State Teachers Association,” November, 29 1929, Director of Athletics, 9/e-1/9, Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner, Correspondence, TOSUA.
the threats to educational broadcasters posed by the FRC’s regulatory policies. However, his involvement in national efforts did not appear to translate into activism on campus.

Each of the presidents in this study also supported intercollegiate football. None of them seemed troubled by the direction their sports programs were taking, although they closely monitored both the national debate and the local controversies that inevitably erupted when their teams had a bad season. Each of these presidents was in office at the time of the release of the Carnegie Report and each presided over the dismissal, demotion, or “resignation” of at least one popular coach or athletic director whose cachet with alumni had plummeted in direct proportion to the team’s win/loss record. Such emphasis on winning, which football reformers linked directly to abuses such as subsidization, recruiting, and sky-rocketing coaching salaries, was downplayed by presidents who chose instead to emphasize the game’s contribution to traditional American values. “Football as well as other forms of athletics is a wholly necessary part of college life and one of its many stimulating and democratic features,” Penn State’s Ralph D. Hetzel announced in an address over KDKA radio in Pittsburgh in 1927, summing up an attitude shared by most presidents of big-time football schools. Even Wisconsin’s Glenn Frank, who had earlier in his administration tacked closely to the ideas of Veblen, Meiklejohn, and other critics of college football, had by 1936 come to the conclusion that intercollegiate athletics could be “a force for democracy, for self-control, for honesty, for patience, and for temperate living.”

All three administrators professed both their support for educational radio and their belief in the educational value of football. However, they consistently stopped short of advocating what might have seemed to be the logical follow through—a marriage of these two components of

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680 Hugo Bezdek at Penn State, Glenn Thistlethwaite at Wisconsin, and John Wilce at Ohio State were released from head football coaching in response to alumni and Athletic Board dissatisfaction.
681 “Greetings from President Hetzel,” 1927. Ralph Dorn Hetzel Papers, A605.17 Box 2, Group 48, Addresses: Athletics, Series 5-42, PSULSC.
college life. Their failure to make that connection was a tacit admission of what football critics had been saying for years—that athletics served the financial and publicity needs of the institution rather than the educational needs of the students. Given the controversy surrounding intercollegiate football in the 1920s and 1930s, a non-commercial venue for radio broadcasts would have reinforced the sense that football belonged in an educational venue.

In 1932, radio broadcasts of Penn State football ended because radio ended. When game day broadcasts resumed in 1938, commercial radio was the only option, and Penn State followed other big-time football schools in taking it. So Penn State had no leadership role on the commercialization issue and did not contribute to the debate.

At Ohio State, Rightmire’s tendency was to delegate responsibility to the athletic director and his vice president who also served on the Athletic Board. His refusal to get involved may be one of the most significant missed opportunities in stemming the commercialization of sports broadcasts. In the spring of 1935, Griffith attempted to negotiate a conference-wide contract for commercial broadcasting of Big Ten football. According to the Athletic Board minutes at Ohio State, “the Directors and Faculty Representatives went on record as favoring a cooperative broadcasting program for the Conference, although two of the college presidents were opposed to the idea.” One of those opponents was Minnesota’s President L.D. Coffman who unsuccessfully tried to enlist Rightmire in his effort. Coffman’s stance is noteworthy for several reasons: He patently refused to accept the move toward commercialized broadcasts as a mere lowering of the bar on amateurism, insisting that it was a misstep that would compound the misguided policies of the past. He suggested that there were uses other than athletics (such as educational radio) in which the proceeds from football could be invested. And he may have

683 “Minutes,” 7 June 1935. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/11, Athletic Board Minutes: 1934-1940, TOSUA.
defied his own athletic director, Frank McCormick, who shared Griffith’s aversion to Roosevelt and socialism.\textsuperscript{684}

The fact that two presidents could halt a proposal approved by eight Big Ten schools is evidence of the power administrators wielded.\textsuperscript{685} Had they chosen to use their leadership positions, a united front of Big Ten presidents almost certainly could have stemmed the inexorable growth and commercialization of intercollegiate football. Rightmire, however, and presumably others, shrugged off the challenge. Rightmire blamed his predecessors for allowing the emphasis on football to create a commercial spectacle from a student-oriented extracurricular activity, and he intimated that there was nothing to be done about it now. The helplessness that Rightmire professed might have been a factor of timing. In 1935, higher education was still staggering from the impact of the Depression and university presidents may have believed that issues more weighty than football deserved their attention. Yet there was another factor in the refusal of administrators to resist the commercialization of football. They appreciated the public relations value. Presidents looked to football to build the college “brand.”

\textsuperscript{684} McCormick’s correspondence with St. John suggests that the Minnesota Athletic Director shared Griffith’s and St. John’s pro-capitalist instincts. In one letter, for example, McCormick complains about proposed restrictions on football practices: “If they start making everything fair and on an equal basis, the first thing you will know we will be as socialist as our present form of government at Washington.” See: Frank G. McCormick to L.W. St. John, 3 April 1934. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/0 Intercollegiate Conference: Athletic Director's Correspondence, 1930-1938, TOSUA. In a later letter to St. John, he noted that both Minnesota’s faculty committee on athletics and its radio committee were in favor of non-sponsored broadcasts of football. McCormick hastened to add, “You will understand that I am not trying to advocate the policy.” Frank McCormick to Lynn W. St. John, 30 November 1935. James Lewis Morrill Papers, RG 3/f-2/2, Athletics :1935-36, TOSUA.

\textsuperscript{685} The Athletic Board Minutes do not mention the presidents by name, however it is likely that the second one was Robert Hutchins of the University of Chicago. Having replaced Amos Alonzo Stagg, the legendary coach and Director of Physical Culture and Athletics, Hutchins had set in motion the process of dismantling football at Chicago which would culminate in 1939. Hutchins believed that football’s excesses had grown beyond the point of reform and that the increasing commercialization served to trivialize the university’s intellectual role in society. When later asked why other Big Ten presidents did not follow his lead in abolishing football, Hutchins replied, “They could not stand the pressure.” Quoted in Hal A. Lawson and Alan G. Ingham, "Conflicting Ideologies Concerning the University and Intercollegiate Athletics: Harper and Hutchins at Chicago, 1892-1940," \textit{Journal of Sport History}, Vol 7, No.3 (1980), pp. 37-67.
As the correspondence from delighted sports fans in this study made clear, educational broadcasts of athletics drew two critical groups of listeners into the university orbit—alumni who could be transported back to the bleachers of their alma mater through the wonder of radio and residents of the state who had not attended the school and had no other particular reason to feel an attachment. The value of the broadcasts could be measured in the considerable publicity that they garnered which kept an institution’s name in the public eye in a way that academic achievement did not. Play-by-play broadcasts helped to develop an understanding of the game and an appreciation for its inherent drama among an audience that had never actually seen big-time football. Especially in the case of the large land-grant universities, the broadcasts also introduced the rural population to a pantheon of All-American heroes of the gridiron. As members of the “imagined community” of Buckeyes or Badgers or Nittany Lions, state residents developed a sense of fraternity with their land-grant that is evident in references in their letters to “our boys” and “our team.” This level of loyalty became increasingly important during the Depression as state-supported schools needed to convince taxpayers and legislators to make educational funding a priority.

Although Levine argued that American higher education fared better than most institutions in the Depression, there can be no doubt that it was a time of tremendous financial hardship. The state funding that land-grants had become accustomed to in the 1920s was simply not forthcoming. The desperation of the situation was evident in the pleas of university presidents such as Rightmire to their state legislatures and governors for increased appropriations. Although the budgets of athletics programs were slashed along with academic programs and faculty salaries, at big-time football schools the sport continued to turn a profit.

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687 “Sixty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Ohio State University to the Governor of Ohio for the Year Ending June 30: Annual Report of the President,” (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1931).
black ink generated by football was surely one reason that pragmatic university presidents chose not to de-emphasize the game. The revenue stream was too important, particularly at schools such as Ohio State, which was still saddled with debt from its sports construction spree in the 1920s. (Wisconsin did not have the debt problem that Ohio State faced, and Badger football continued to make and spend profits earned at the gate. One indication is that in some of the worst years of the Depression, 1932-33, Wisconsin’s head coach had a higher salary than any of his peers in the Big Ten—$10,000.) 688

By 1932, many educational radio stations had either closed their operations or were languishing on inferior channels. Consequently, colleges and universities were willing to accommodate the commercial broadcasters who wanted to carry their games. The perceived need for public relations was also a determining factor in the decision of most schools to continue football broadcasts in the early Depression years, despite fears that game coverage was hurting gate receipts. Even later, when broadcast privileges were sold to sponsors, publicity—not profits—was the impetus. As summarized by the Wisconsin Alumni Magazine:

> It would be difficult to name a single college or university in this country that has made itself famous because of its course in anthropology or Latin or some other study of its extensive curriculum.….Football advertises college life as no other college product could possibly do….It makes even the most careless and inattentive to the college institutions turn their eyes to such centers of study and culture, and consider the possibility of sending their own children to these centers. 689

Among these three case studies, evidence was found only at Ohio State for a decisive role by an administrator other than the president. J.L. Morrill, for whom the office of vice president was created at Ohio State, was a major figure in the decision to sell broadcast privileges. In lieu of paeans to intercollegiate athletics or kneejerk reactions to distasteful politics, Morrill left a record that expressed his deeply divided thoughts on the issue. To a counterpart at another school, he

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688 “1932-33 Athletic Salaries Director of Athletics,” 9/e-1/12, Intercollegiate Conference: Salary Comparisons: 1929-1933, TOSUA.

confided his self doubts about the increasing commercialization of football. He also invited commercial radio operators to offer their constructive criticism at a pivotal moment. He sought the counsel of other faculty and administrators in the Big Ten, and in his typically circumspect manner, he tried to anticipate all the angles and outcomes of each radio policy he helped to shape.

In a three-year period from 1935-37, Morrill experimented with three different options: selling exclusive rights to one station, making broadcasts available to anyone on a sustaining-only basis, and finally, allowing any station to carry the broadcasts on a sponsorship basis for a modest privilege fee. The first strategy was opposed by every station except the one that enjoyed exclusive rights. The second strategy caused commercial broadcasters to simply ignore Ohio State which provoked alumni who blamed their alma mater. The third option—making broadcasts available to any station that wanted them, with sponsorship permitted for a minor privilege fee—took effect in 1937. In settling on this strategy, Ohio State officials clearly were looking to satisfy the networks and commercial operators upon whom they depended for good publicity. From earlier dealings with commercial radio, the University had learned the hard way that when stations were annoyed by Ohio State’s broadcast policies they could use the full strength of their airwaves—and their editorial pages in the case of those stations that were owned by newspapers—to protest.

Economic Influences

The commercialization of college sports broadcasts proved to be one aspect in the increasingly competitive business approach to football that developed in response to the Depression. At Ohio State, for instance, St. John instituted a supply-and-demand pricing structure for tickets in 1930 in order to charge more for the high-profile games that would attract bigger crowds because it was neither “reasonable nor good business for us to charge the same prices for
the Indiana game here as we do for the Michigan game,” he said. Other schools soon followed St. John’s lead in what may have been a ripple effect of the Griffith philosophy. Objections to commercialization of football were increasingly ignored as the Depression wore on and the standard of amateurism continued to fall. By the end of the decade, the desirability of amateurism itself was under debate. At the 1939 NCAA convention, St. John raised the question of whether “intercollegiate athletics can continue to exist in a condition that might be described as ‘half slave and half free’…where some institutions pay their athletes and other institutions insist on operating on an amateur basis.” A partial response to that question might be deduced from the remarks Morrill made at that same conference:

We must understand realistically that the British sports tradition—highly individual, conceived for Oxford and Cambridge ‘gentlemen’ of wealth and leisure—is not suited to the American milieu nor adapted to the typical college community and constituency of this country. Work, not leisure, is the respected motivating drive in our still competitive society. Team play, with its overtones of loyalty to a cause or an institution larger than one’s self…is the American college ideal.

Regulatory Influences

The decisions that led to commercialized sports broadcasts were made within a political and social system that supported the status quo. The structure of radio was designed primarily by and for commercial operators who also oversaw the system as they rotated between industry and regulatory agencies. The policies they devised favored stations with superior equipment, large staffs, ample financial resources, and the ability to fill the most airtime. Few educational broadcasters met those standards. They made do with whatever equipment they could buy or

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690 L.W. St. John to Edward H. Laurer, 6 May 1932. Athletic Director, RG 9/e-1/9, Intercollegiate Conference, Athletic Director's Correspondence: 1930-38, TOSUA.
691 Lynn W. St. John, "Reports of Districts: Fourth District," (Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Convention of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, Los Angeles, December 29, 1939). This was in response to the Southeastern Conference and others who were giving full athletic scholarships, a policy that the Big Ten did not follow at the time.
They were staffed by professors and students who had other responsibilities. They had comparatively little funding to support their efforts, and their broadcast schedules followed the university calendar which usually meant no programming on weekends, over semester breaks and throughout the summer. Those stations that met the FRC’s guidelines were large commercial broadcasters, often affiliated with one of the two main national networks—NBC which emerged in 1926 or CBS which began operating a year later. Although no content analyses were done in this study, a perusal of programming schedules from the *New York Times* in the 1930s shows a broad similarity of formats and programming on network radio versus a rich diversity of programming on WHA and WOSU. In addition to sporting events, educational broadcasters carried many genres of musical presentations, drama performances, farm and weather shows, instructional coursework, political and current events discussions, how-to programs, and lectures on topics drawn from virtually every curricular area. It should have been difficult to argue that the radio stations on the campuses of land-grant institutions were “special interest” or “propaganda” operations, yet that is exactly the charge leveled by the FRC in challenging the applications of dozens of educational broadcasters. The FRC insisted that “general-interest” broadcasters—as the agency referred to commercial stations that carried primarily jazz, dramas and sports—were more inclined to serve the public interest because they responded to the dictates of the marketplace. Further, the FRC implied that nature itself had ordained the marketplace system as the inherently logical foundation for radio, a philosophy articulated in the FRC’s *Second Annual Report*:

Propaganda stations…are not consistent with the most beneficial sort of discussion of public questions. As a general rule, postulated on the laws of nature as well as on the standard of public interest, convenience, or necessity, particular doctrines, creeds, and beliefs must find their way into the market of ideas by the existing public-service stations, and if they are of sufficient importance to the listening public the microphone will undoubtedly be available….The contention may be made that propaganda stations

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693 In addition, a study cited by Spalding that examined 200 hours of weekly broadcasts on the NBC Red and Blue networks during the 1928-1929 season found that the two chains devoted 71% of their broadcasts to music and 21% to talks. All other categories of programs were relegated to the remaining 8% of the broadcast week. See: John W. Spalding, "1928: Radio Becomes a Mass Advertising Medium," *Journal of Broadcasting*, Vol. 31 (1963-1964), p.40.
are as well able as other stations to accompany their messages with entertainment and other program features of interest to the public. Even if this were true, the fact remains that the station is used for what is essentially a private purpose for a very substantial portion of the time.694

Most FRC commissioners seemed impervious to the thought that commercial stations also served an essentially private purpose as they promoted the sale of products, services, and lifestyles. Nor did they appear to consider that big business could exercise censorship. The tendency of the FRC was to view any non-profit system of broadcasting as a step toward socialism if not full-fledged totalitarianism. According to the FRC, a system that operated on the profit motive would naturally produce the best and most independent programming because it would be competing with other broadcasters for listeners. “We should give use of these channels [to] private enterprise where there would be no restraint on program,” former FRC chair and CBS vice president Henry Bellows recommended in 1931.695

Each of the case studies in this dissertation offers evidence of the obstacles that educational and other small broadcasters had to overcome. They were often forced to shift frequency and power assignments, share time with other broadcasters, and spend their typically meager funds to ward off challenges from other stations and to travel to Washington, D.C. to defend their own turf in costly and time-consuming legal challenges. Ordered to invest in new equipment or to upgrade their old equipment—often for understandably good purposes of improving technical quality—educational broadcasters often struggled to meet FRC timelines because their biennial budgetary systems were not conducive to securing quick cash flows. The onset of the Depression intensified the hardships for broadcasters. Some, such as Penn State, were pushed to the edge and reluctantly gave up broadcasting. Others endured lesser but still frustrating iniquities such as re-assigned airtime that left Wisconsin’s and Ohio State’s stations

with no evening hours. Evenings were the only times that they could reasonably expect farmers and other workers to tune in to the programs that had been created specifically for their needs. It also meant that they could no longer carry basketball broadcasts which had proved to be very popular with listeners. Other perceived injustices likewise added to the impression of educational broadcasters that the FRC favored commercial operators. For example, educational broadcasters were quick to be reprimanded for time-sharing or other violations, yet the FRC sometimes failed to intervene when they were the victims of violations.

With the regulatory and ideological odds against them, it is not surprising that so many educational broadcasters had given up by the early 1930s. Some, such as the Connecticut State College simply went dark when it became clear that regulatory policies would not accommodate educational broadcasters. 696 Other stations, such as Loyala University’s WWL went completely commercial. 697 Still others, such as Cornell, maintained a station but sold advertising to support it. 698 Some of the stations that went commercial hoped that it would be a temporary measure that would tide them over for the duration of the Depression. Rarely, was that the case.

Penn State represents one college where regulatory issues contributed to the end of radio. But financial factors also explain why educational radio at Penn State never got the traction it developed elsewhere. The campus station, to a great extent, remained a project of the engineering school. Faced with mounting deficits, radio became an expendable item. Although dedicated faculty members often dug into their own pockets and ran WPSC on slim budgets, the administration and Board of Trustees were not willing to make even the moderate investment

696 S.E. Frost, Jr., *Education's Own Stations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), p.72. Frost quoted the station’s letter to the FCC: "Since the differences between the fundamental motivating forces in educational broadcasting and those in commercial broadcasting forever render competition on an equal basis impossible and since no federal policies have been adopted to equalize the competition for radio facilities, there is little hope that the WCAC service can ever develop into a significant state educational project."

697 W.A. Burk to Harold B.McCarty, 3 January 1933. WHA Radio and Television, Box 2, Folder 007, Steenbock Library.

needed to continue radio operations in 1932. One of their chief concerns was the unpredictability of the FRC which they feared would continue to request costly equipment upgrades on short notice that made no allowances for the college’s slow-moving budgetary process. However, even if WPSC had survived a bit longer, the College’s record of cooperation with industry suggests that it would have favorably considered a commercial offer. To a greater degree than Ohio State or Wisconsin, Penn State’s faculty and administration identified with industry. Pennsylvania was a largely industrial state. As the director of Penn State’s Division of Industrial Research reminded his colleagues and alumni in 1926:

> Industry is essentially competitive and will probably never reach the degree of cooperative spirit which the farmers have long since learned to adopt. Each manufacturing plant has its own problems and is self-reliant in attacking them. It never thinks of appealing to the State Government for help or specific information. Indeed, it often limits its interest in politics to urging an indiscriminate reduction in taxes.  

Although Ohio was also heavily industrialized, Ohio State, along with Wisconsin, had been influenced to a greater degree by the progressive philosophies that derived from the agrarian populism of the Midwest. Far from the laissez faire approach favored by industry, progressive policies entailed heavy government involvement in public welfare. The initial partnership of most university licensees with government involved agriculture. Because the land-grant institutions already had close ties to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) their radio stations became early and productive partners of government. The university stations carried USDA broadcasts that included weather forecasts and market information to help farmers plan their harvests and crop shipments. At both Ohio State and Wisconsin, the agricultural extension divisions worked with their state Departments of Agriculture to develop their own informational programs, as well.  

Penn State, by contrast, while it produced its own agricultural shows, did

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not carry USDA programs or work closely with the state Agriculture Department. This may have resulted in a missed opportunity to forge political ties with state and federal officials. And political clout was important. Both the University of Wisconsin and Ohio State were located in their state capitals and had warm relationships with state government officials. These ties often paid off in the radio stations’ dealings with the FRC such as when attorneys general or governors testified on behalf of their states’ educational licenses.

**The Audience**

Partly because the land-grant institutions were so quick to grasp the potential of radio, their commitment to educational and informational programming established an early standard of public service for American radio. Yet, the directors of campus radio stations also believed that their airwaves were a proper home for athletic broadcasts. They demonstrated their commitment to airing sports by building the infrastructure—broadcast booths in stadiums, underground cables to the transmitters, and expensive telephone lines—to make live play-by-play coverage possible. Like their administrators, they also understood the public relations value of athletic broadcasts. Energized by the positive response from appreciative audiences, radio directors hoped that the listeners who tuned in for football might remain for the other entertainment, informational, and educational programming so that the university “may be better understood and perchance better loved,” according to WHA’s program director W.H. Lighty.

At the beginning of the radio era, listeners and policy-makers alike expressed a preference for a media environment free of “commercial ballyhoo.” Yet sports fans, in

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702 “Educational Radio Broadcasting,” April, 1923. Harold B. McCarty Papers, Box 49, Folder 8, WSHS.
particular, did not appear to raise any major objection to having game coverage laced with advertising. In that regard, the listening audience was also a factor in the commercialization of college broadcasts. This study suggests several potential explanations to account for sports fans’ acceptance of advertising.

1. Sports had been commercialized from the start. Football programs filled with ads and stadium concession stands selling food and souvenirs were aspects of the game even before the advent of radio. In addition, the early broadcasts of Ivy League football by commercial stations created a tradition of association between football and sponsors. When an advertising-based economic system became the norm in the Depression years, football fans had become accustomed to commercials as a necessary nuisance to be endured in order to get game day coverage.

2. Football games were objective competitions. While poor refereeing or a home team advantage could sway the outcome, a commercial could not. So the fear that the corporate ethos would somehow permeate the programming did not exist with athletic broadcasts as it did for educational fare at Wisconsin, for example.

3. Sports fans placed a higher priority on the quality of the broadcast than on its commercial or non-commercial status. As university broadcasters endured years of inferior frequencies and power assignments, listeners sought out the cleanest signal regardless of whether the game was sponsored. The best signal was rarely the educational broadcaster’s. In addition, although local announcers sometimes became quite popular, they rarely could compete with play-by-play announcers such as Graham McNamee and Ted Husing who had been groomed and promoted by their radio networks to be celebrities.

4. Many of the commercial stations were owned by newspapers that used their columns to promote their own broadcasts and announcers, stimulating more interest in those stations. Commercial stations had large audiences, and a regular listener might be more inclined through habit or loyalty to listen to college football on a commercial station even if there were other
options. In addition, educational broadcasts of sports were largely ignored by the commercial media. For example, in 1935 Ohio State alumni complained of their inability to hear Buckeye football. Although WOSU carried non-commercial broadcasts of each game that season, the New York Times reported that Ohio State games “are not available except over WLW, Cincinnati on the wave of which they are sponsored.”

5. The quality of the educational broadcasts may have spiraled downward as the radio staff lost interest in producing a program that was replicated by commercial stations. By the late 1930s, both WHA and WOSU had won national recognition for their instructional programming. The positive feedback and the sense of mission that drove the educational programs did not carry over to athletic broadcasts. A lack of effort is suggested by the complaints Wisconsin’s Harold McCarty received in 1937 concerning the WHA announcer. “He doesn’t seem to improve with age as he was making just as many errors as ever last Saturday and shows entirely too much partiality for his team….Every radio that I heard here last Saturday was tuned to WTMJ for Winnie’s description of the game because of the favoritism and errors by our announcer.” Incredibly, 17 years later, McCarty was still getting complaints about the same announcer who had moved from football to basketball broadcasts. “He commits the unpardonable sin of showing prejudice in favor of Wisconsin and his near tantrums when Wisconsin scores, must be the wrath of more than one engineer trying to maintain a decent level….Is it possible that one of the largest Universities in the Nation can’t provide us with a sportsman as well as an announcer?” It seems likely that Wisconsin indeed could have found a better announcer. It may be that the announcer, a prominent alumnus, was protected just as Rightmire had preserved an announcer’s

705 Charles L. Hill to H.B. McCarty, 20 October 1937. WHA Radio and Television 41/06/02-5, Box 27, General Subject, Steenbock Library.
job for a friend of Ohio State. Or it could be that WHA’s managers just did not care enough to pay a professional announcer.

General audiences appeared to follow sports fans in accepting the industry’s contention that advertising was the price to be paid for “free” radio. As early as 1924, Radio Broadcast, reporting on the trend toward sponsored programming, concluded that despite warnings that advertising would doom radio, “the public has no strong objection to this practice;…the excellent quality of entertainment actually neutralized opposition from listeners.”

Regulators and industry insiders such as Bellows then cited such articles as evidence that there was no need or market for educational radio and no need to guarantee a percentage of channels to educators, a proposal widely derided by the industry as “socialistic” in contrast to the “American way.”

McChesney and others have noted the explicit use of the term “American system” to refer to the plan that supported the status quo. McChesney quotes one broadcast reformer in 1934 who wrote:

The phrase ‘American system’ was coined as a banner with which to glorify the present structure of broadcasting in the United States. The idea seems to have been that whenever the American System was mentioned people were to feel that they had something which was particularly patriotic and which was to be defended against anything and everything which might savor of any other nation.

Yet, WOSU and WHA also represented models that were arguably as “American” as the networks. Ohio State’s station was funded by the university as part of its commitment to extension services whereby the resources of the school were made available to the citizen-taxpayers of the state. Wisconsin adopted a model that drew funding directly from the state in a partnership with other state-wide departments while retaining the university’s control over the programming of the station. Together, these radio operations represented an “American system”

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of broadcasting, rooted in the philosophy and traditions of the land-grant colleges and universities. Not only were they non-commercial enterprises, but they departed from the non-profit models in Europe that were routinely dismissed by U.S. industry officials as “socialized” or “nationalized” radio. These land-grant broadcasters represented a uniquely American third way of broadcasting. Although they valued their independence, the stations that survived maintained close ties to state and federal government. Some stations drew much of their content from other agencies of the state such as Departments of Education, Agriculture, and Health. Nor did they shy away from political discourse on their airwaves, as the commercial stations did. Although these stations, like the BBC, were supported by tax dollars, they did not assess a tax directly on the user. Rather, since the benefit of the broadcasts was intended to be available to every resident, the state government funded radio as an extension project of the university, either directly through the state budgetary process or indirectly as part of the overall appropriation to the university.

By airing play-by-play football coverage for decades, both WHA and WOSU also demonstrated an alternative to one facet of the commercialization of college sports. However, the broadcasts on educational radio were ultimately overshadowed by the commercial accounts. This study found that campus radio stations made at least two moves that in retrospect might have been missteps. First, they deemphasized their athletic broadcasts which were arguably their most popular programming as indicated by the “applause cards,” surveys, and letters to the station. Educational broadcasters were interested in showing that they could provide services that commercial radio was unwilling to offer because of a potentially small audience. College football clearly did not fall into that category. So even though it was among the most popular programming, radio directors seldom made explicit references to it in their presentations to the FRC, to the public, or within their own educational organizations. Generally, football broadcasts were included in a category of “other programs” along with fare such as religious services that did not fall into instructional or educational categories or have the cultural uplift value of
entertainment programming such as opera. Although it is understandable that educational broadcasters would want to draw a clear distinction between their public service missions and the profit-making goal of commercial radio, it would seem that their football coverage could have been used as a rebuttal to the industry officials who chided them for dull material and lack of programming diversity.

Second, the policy of giving away their broadcasts may have been misguided. While it is understandable that the land-grant mandate obligated them to share the bounty of the campus, they may not have needed to be quite so generous in giving or selling broadcast privileges to other stations. Educational broadcasters did not want to be seen as using tax dollars to compete with private enterprise which is why they frequently emphasized that they were not vying with commercial radio for listeners. However, it seems that by offering broadcasts on a sustaining basis only, which could easily have been justified in the context of a land-grant university, they would have more than met their obligation to spread the benefits of their institutions. If commercial radio chose not to carry the broadcasts, as stations in Ohio did in 1936, that decision should have reflected the hollowness of the commercial industry’s claim to serve the public interest. Further, given the phenomenal spike in football interest, popular demand might have created the clamor for better channel and power assignments that the educational broadcasters could not get on the merits of their instructional programs. Although this study found that radio directors were the least influential group on campus in setting sports broadcasting policy, it is worth further study to understand why they chose to downplay their athletic coverage rather than using it to leverage a better position on the broadcast band. At a time when professional football was derided as a tawdry spectacle that lacked the amateur ideal of collegiate sports, educational stations could have forcefully made the case that they were the proper vehicle for intercollegiate
athletics. However, disagreements among educators, who lacked a cohesive vision or strategy, made non-commercial broadcasters a poor match for their rivals.\textsuperscript{709}

**Rhetorical Influence**

The rhetoric used by industry officials and trade publications to portray the land-grant alternative system as somehow unpatriotic reveals the fear of corporate capitalists that government was making unwanted intrusions into their territory. Invoked to distinguish the commercial model of broadcasting from the systems in Canada, Europe, and elsewhere, the term “American system” reinforced and validated the United States’ model as a natural, home-grown process that would tame the wild “ether” through hard work, competition, and innovation.

Whether by design or coincidence, Griffith and others in the Big Ten also used themes of “Americanism” in their references to intercollegiate football. For instance, they contrasted the football squad to the protesters—found at all three campuses in this study—who petitioned and marched against compulsory ROTC. The latter were impugned as anarchists or traitors. The football players were portrayed as exemplars of courage, sacrifice, team spirit, and competitive instincts. In a confidential memo to St. John, Griffith conveyed what may be the clearest statement of his belief concerning football’s role in American society. “Our entire philosophy of athletics is inextricably interwoven into our American philosophy of life,” he wrote. “We are a capitalistic nation and so we believe in champions and championships.”\textsuperscript{710} Such rhetoric may have contributed to the survival of intercollegiate football as a commercialized business through both Depression and scandal.\textsuperscript{711} Given the social upheaval, the ongoing economic uncertainties,

\textsuperscript{709} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{710} John Griffith to L.W. St. John, 3 February 1932. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10, Intercollegiate Conference: Athletic Directors Correspondence, 1930-1938, TOSUA.

\textsuperscript{711} Bradley Ellis Austin, "A Competitive Business: The Ideologies, Cultures, and Practice of Men's and Women's College Sports During the Depression." PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2001.
and the looming threat of war in Europe, a skittish citizenry may have been more likely to forgive, support, and embrace football. What’s more, by aligning football’s interests and ideals with the competitive corporate ethos rather than the public service mission of land-grant universities, Griffith prepared the ground for commercialized broadcasting of athletics which would reach its zenith in the television era. That he forged such an alignment is clear from a memorandum he sent to the conference athletic directors in 1937. Commenting on a book on national prosperity, Griffith noted that the author should have included “the athletic directors in the schools and colleges of this country with the business men, bankers, manufacturers, etc., because they must think in terms of the future and because they are constantly forced to make economic decisions.”

The Precedent for Television

While commercial broadcasting of college sports on radio created the precedent for television football broadcasts, it was qualitatively different. Unlike television broadcast rights, which were negotiated by the NCAA, radio broadcasting operated as part of a system of “home rule” where each school or conference acted in its own interest and the NCAA had no enforcement powers. Although broadcast rights were sometimes negotiated on a conference-wide basis, they were never monopolized and controlled from the top as television rights were until 1984 when a court ruling declared the NCAA to be in violation of anti-trust laws. Radio broadcasting of football was pursued by higher education not principally for the revenue it might generate but for its role in keeping the institution’s name before the public. In the 1920s and

1930s, radio was not the lucrative proposition that television would be almost from the start. With the exception of a few schools such as Yale, which commanded $20,000 from a sponsor for the sale of exclusive broadcast rights in 1936, schools that sold their radio rights generally received fairly modest compensation. Nonetheless, some educators saw where the trend toward commercialization was heading. Minnesota’s Director of Extension derided the widespread abandonment of non-commercial football broadcasts in 1936 as other schools followed Yale’s lead:

> The obvious next step will be to call the victorious players before the microphone after the game ends to extol the merits of someone’s brand of coffee, cigarettes, cereal food, or underwear. One writer in a publication of national circulation has suggested that a football team might well select a quarterback who can double as a crooner. The possibilities kindle the imagination.  

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Yet, the die was cast by 1936. Once Yale and other big-time schools had sold exclusive broadcasting rights, a gold rush was on as higher education negotiated for lucrative contracts. Since most educational broadcasters had folded their operations by 1936, there was little to constrain athletic departments from shopping for the best deal. And since the money was sorely needed to fund the minor sports that had suffered the deepest cuts in the Depression, universities could argue that their motives were pure. At the conference level, Griffith used an educational justification to convince athletic directors to push for more broadcasting money. In 1937, for example, he complained to St. John that the individual Big Ten schools had made a total of only $10,000 to $15,000 from the sale of their broadcast privileges the previous season. He believed they could bring in $100,000 as a conference. He told St. John that he was in consultation with some people who wanted “to do a high class bit of broadcasting” that would entail mid-week programs to “expatiate on the educational aspects of athletics, etc.,” and play-by-play coverage on game day in which the broadcasters would “refuse to criticize the officials or players and instead

will call attention to the fine acts of sportsmanship, to the drama, etc.”715 Just a few years earlier, Griffith would have been satisfied with an opportunity to promote football as an enactment of tradition American values. By 1937, however, he expected to also make a substantial profit in the process.

To the extent that radio paved the way for television broadcasts it was primarily in broadening the audience and fueling the demand for collegiate games among a population with no particular ties to a given college or university. So tenaciously did football take hold of the public in the 1920s, that in some states it became a basic taxpayer right where legislators mandated that the land-grant university’s games be available to all via radio. That legacy of entitlement carried over into the 21st century when the collegiate/corporate partnership known as the Big Ten Network insisted that its games should be carried by giant cable companies as part of their expanded basic packages. In the debate between the network and cable operators, Michigan Congressman John Dingell insisted that citizens should have the “ability to enjoy what their tax dollars have made possible” because “college sports provide a touchstone, not only for a school or alumni group, but also for an entire state and have become, over the years, a public good and part of our common culture.”716

Some media reformers continued to look to WOSU and WHA as viable alternatives. In congressional hearings on television in 1951, a New Jersey educator suggested the creation of a government-funded television network composed of and financed in the manner of land-grant colleges. Ohio Senator John W. Bricker concurred, noting that “the state universities could carry the great burden of the expense.” As evidence of their broadcasting expertise, he noted that the Ohio State University’s radio station “has worked perfectly. It covers the whole state. There are

715 John L. Griffith to L.W. St. John, 27 March 1937. Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/, Intercollegiate Conference, Commissioner, Correspondence (Griffith and St.John): Apr. 1937-Dec.1939, TOSUA.
no commercials on it.” Connecticut Senator William Benton agreed, adding that WOSU’s example showed “that there is another kind of economic foundation around which television could be developed other than just commercial sponsorship.”

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717 Bricker and Benton jointly sponsored a resolution (SJ 76) on TV regulation. Their quotes are taken from the debate in the Senate. See: U.S. Senate. Senator John W. Bricker and Senator William Benton Speak on Joint Resolution on Television Regulation, Congressional Record. 82d Cong., 1st Sess., Vol. 97, Pt.5 (June 5, 1951), P.6117.
## Appendix A

### Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAUP</td>
<td>American Association of University Professors</td>
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<td>ACUBS</td>
<td>Association of College and University Broadcasting Stations</td>
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<td>ASCAP</td>
<td>American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers</td>
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<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Company (later Commission)</td>
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<td>CBS</td>
<td>Columbia Broadcasting System</td>
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<td>FCC</td>
<td>Federal Communications Commission</td>
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<td>FRC</td>
<td>Federal Radio Commission</td>
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<td>FREC</td>
<td>Federal Radio Education Commission</td>
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<td>National Association of Broadcasters</td>
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<td>National Recovery Act</td>
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<td>RCA</td>
<td>Radio Corporation of America</td>
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### Appendix B

#### Station Index

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Abstract
From the late 1920s to the mid-1930s, broadcasting of intercollegiate sports at many state institutions migrated from educational radio stations to commercial networks. Amid the economic pressures of the Great Depression, the sale of sports broadcasting rights provided universities with a steady revenue stream, while the publicity from the broadcasts raised their profile among citizens and legislators whose support was crucial to state institutions. Yet, commercialization bolstered critics’ claims that intercollegiate athletics had become a business rather than an extracurricular activity. Drawing upon the scholarship of critical political economy, this dissertation examined the process by which commercial radio became the venue for big-time intercollegiate athletics—even at institutions that had their own radio stations—at a time when reformers insisted that only an amateur status and educational purpose for sports could justify the presence of big-time athletics on campus. In case studies of three land-grant institutions—Penn State, Ohio State, and the University of Wisconsin—this dissertation found that the decision to sell broadcast privileges was resisted by directors of educational radio stations on campus, supported by athletic and conference directors, and largely ignored by administrative pragmatists who were distracted by the daunting task of keeping their institutions solvent throughout the Depression. This study concluded that the decline of educational radio as a purveyor of college sports mirrored the overall decline of non-commercial broadcasting in the 1930s. It also reflected the wider debate on the role of the state as the representative of the collective interest in a free enterprise system. The partnership between big-time football schools and commercial broadcasters, forged in the Depression Era, created the climate of collaboration in which television broadcasting of intercollegiate athletics would flourish in subsequent decades. Ohio State and Wisconsin were exceptions in that they continued to carry intercollegiate sports on their own university stations. In doing so, each demonstrated the feasibility of an economic model for sports broadcasting that was grounded in the public service outreach and extension missions of the land-grant institution rather than the competitive, profit-seeking model of commercial radio.

Keywords Intercollegiate athletics history
Educational radio history
John L. Griffith
Big Ten Conference

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