

# History of KHSU

One of the things that intrigues first-time visitors to KHSU is the fact that **KHSU is located in two different places**: the studio facilities are situated, as they have been since 1960, on the third floor of the University's Theatre Arts building; the office has been quartered since 1987 in the Wagner House, on the edge of the Humboldt State University campus overlooking Highway 101.

Not since the mid 1980's have the studio and office been co-located. In the late 1980's plans were drawn up for an elegant state-of-the-art broadcast suite high atop the Theatre Arts building. The project was slated to begin with the fiscal 1994 budget. However, at the dawn of the last decade of the 20th century, the project's major funder, the State of California, experienced serious budgetary problems and the project was put on hold.

But budgets and buildings come and go. **It is the intimate, illusory, ethereal nature of radio** that captures the hearts and minds of listeners. And it is this non-tangible essence of radio that infinitely continues through the cosmos in a search for other ears.

Radio broadcasts from Humboldt State College (HSC) were sporadic in the 1930s. **One of the earliest reported broadcasts** of that era consisted of a half hour mix of sports, music (Charles Fulkerson playing the piano), and talk (an address by HSC president Arthur Gist and an explanation of freshman-sophomore hazing). Humboldt State College was on the air. Its purpose: to publicize the university.

Radio classes became part of HSC's curriculum in 1941. A studio was set up by the northeast stairs in Founder's Hall. Don Karshner (Drama and Speech chair) and John Van Duzer (Assistant Drama professor) painted, bought carpet, and covered the walls with burlap. **The first broadcast** of the HSC Radio Workshop was heard on KIEM radio October 30, 1941. The broadcasts at this time were fed through phone lines to KIEM's transmitter in Eureka.

World War II interrupted the status quo, and radio at Humboldt was on hold. Following the war, the California Department of Higher Education concluded that HSC was the appropriate campus to develop a radio program because the campus' remote, rural location meant that graduates could find immediate employment in the small local market.

On **December 1, 1947 KHSC-AM signed on as a 10 watt carrier** current station providing campus-wide coverage. Since its signal was transmitted through the campus electrical system, KHSC was not technically or legally a broadcast station. HSC's "Radio Shack" stood on campus where music practice rooms stand today.

**The modern era of broadcasting from Humboldt** began in January, 1955 when the station's first transmitter, built by Dr. Roscoe Peithman and his electronics class, became fully operational. On March 14, 1955, KHSC initiated its first regular broadcast schedule, programming six hours a day, weekdays, under the direction of Dr. William Ladd.



On January 22, 1960 KHSC moved into the present KHSU studio location on the third floor of the Theatre Arts Building and filed an application with the Federal Communications Commission for a 10 watt educational FM license on 90.5 megahertz. And on October 17, 1960 KHSC-FM **signed on as the first licensed non-commercial FM station in the California State University and College System.**

Broadcasting Monday through Friday from 3 to 9:30 p.m., the station covered most of Arcata and the immediate area. A wired broadcast was programmed simultaneously on 700 AM for campus residents. The station, operated by the students of radio and television professors Dale Anderson and Dr. G.D. Goodrich, began airing programs aimed at both the student body and the community.

KHSC, the educational radio voice of Humboldt State College, **functioned as a training facility for students** interested in the broadcast arts and as a provider of quality educational programming for the campus and community--a dual function with inherent conflicts. Programming was already diverse: discussions of the student housing shortage; the Sequoia Concerts; "dinner music," folk music and jazz. And HSC's Journalism Department produced for broadcast local news reports.

In the early '60s, **television was also a part of the HSU curriculum**, and students flocked to the new medium. It is interesting to note that the women students of that time served mostly as receptionists and not as technical support or "talent." (This was also true of radio from Humboldt during the '60s.)

Things changed in 1969 when a complete package of television equipment, purchased in 1963, blew its tubes, and the TV program at HSC was phased out. Many broadcast students had deserted radio for the glamour of television, and class reductions had led to funding reductions. As broadcast students flocked back to radio, they found a program with few classes and ancient equipment.

**In 1971, the phase-out threat was extended to radio.** Everything that had been bought in 1959 was worn out and faculty advisor Goodrich asked for \$3,285 to replace the equipment, which should have been replaced six years earlier. He was given \$500, at a time when an unprecedented number of students - 80 - were using the station and broadcasting more hours than ever before - 77 hours per week.

Funding continued to be an obstacle, but when KHSC moved from the auspices of the Theatre Arts Department to the Speech Communication Department funds became available which enabled the station to remain viable.

**The call letters became KHSU** on October 4, 1972 reflecting the change from Humboldt State College to Humboldt State University.

**The station's popularity on campus soared.** In the spring of 1976 a student services poll asked students to rate campus services. KHSU was rated highest (followed by financial aid



and the Lumberjack). Reflecting the students' commitment to their radio station, in 1978 the HSU Associated Students purchased a new solid state transmitter and stereo generator, and on October 9 the first stereo broadcast was heard on KHSU-FM. The station began broadcasting 24 hours on weekends and lengthened on-air time to 20 hours a day Monday through Thursday.

By the next year, in addition to money from the University and Associated Students, KHSU was funded by underwriters, advertisers in the program guide, benefit concerts, and the Friends of KHSU. KHSU's first "Marathon," aka Membership Drive, took place December 6-14, 1979 and raised \$7500 in pledges. It was here when **KHSU became a member-supported radio station.**

The October 4, 1982 **power boost to 100 watts expanded the coverage area** to a ten-mile radius of campus and KHSU began broadcasting at 91.5 megahertz. The student electronic sandbox era was drawing to a close. As the campus station reached deeper into the community, listeners were sometimes offended, and "professionalism" became an issue. KHSU had reached a new plateau in its evolution.

August, 1983 was a landmark month. On August 1, KHSU received a \$57,000 grant from the National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) to be used for a power increase, **satellite downlink facilities and new studio equipment.** Additional monies, from a variety of local sources and fundraising campaigns, made the purchase of a satellite dish possible. Then, on August 30, KHSU received FCC approval to construct a 9,000 watt radio station.

As the first broadcast of the old HSC Radio Workshop was heard in October of 1941, so it was that in October, 1984, radio from Humboldt took another leap. On October 1 **KHSU aired its first satellite program:** National Public Radio's (NPR) All Things Considered. And on October 3, 1984, at 10:20 a.m., KHSU began testing, back on 90.5 FM--at 9,000 watts. KHSU could now be heard as far north as Gold Beach, Oregon and south down the coast into Mendocino County. The signal could often be heard as far east as Willow Creek.



In 1987, C. Parker Van Hecke arrived from Alaska as the new general manager. Van Hecke's mandate was to make KHSU grow. Ties with the Speech Communication Department were severed, and on January 1, 1988 **KHSU became an independent entity**, with direct responsibility to the Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities.

The time was ripe for KHSU to become fully CPB (Corporation for Public Broadcasting)-qualified. The only requirement the station still needed to meet for qualification was having five full-time paid employees. Van Hecke was unwilling to wait for the University to fund additional state positions at the possible rate of one per year, and so, by reconfiguring budget allocations to cover those salaries, in May of 1988 KHSU was able to **become fully CPB-qualified** in only five months rather than five years. CPB qualification made the station eligible for federal funding.

Broadcast quality and community outreach became KHSU's prime goal. "We're not talking about a student training program any more," Van Hecke stated. "**My main concern is to serve the public.**" Student involvement needs to become more sophisticated." The new management team toughed out a flurry of criticism and demands from both students who felt that KHSU was their station and from the greater listening audience which now had a public radio station with high quality local and national programming.

KHSU began reaching out to even farther segments of the community in July, 1990 when **construction of three translators began.** Thanks to another NTIA grant received in 1989, KHSU can be heard on 89.1 FM in the Ferndale/Fortuna area; 89.7 FM in Garberville, and 99.7 FM in Willow Creek.



In 1995, KHSU began significant equipment upgrades, including a **new main antenna** to replace the weathered and aged structure on Barry Ridge in Kneeland, a digital FM exciter, and new translator equipment in Willow Creek. These projects were made possible by a grant from the NTIA/PTFP, plus matching funds from the community raised during the 1995 Spring Membership Drive. The drive was the most successful in KHSU's history to that point, raising over \$53,000.

Other equipment upgrades that year included changes in the satellite downlink equipment which enabled KHSU to receive its **first digitally transmitted program** from National Public Radio in July, 1995. More contributions from members and NTIA/PTFP made it possible to replace the on-air audio console and upgrade other studio equipment in 1996.

KHSU began its second significant signal expansion project in 1994, applying to the FCC for permission to **construct a "repeater" transmitter and auxiliary studio in Crescent City**, California. Funding assistance was sought from NTIA/PTFP, as in previous major construction projects. Both federal agencies gave final approval to the project in late 1997, and KHSR-FM began broadcasting at 91.9 FM on July 26, 1999. A small auxiliary studio was originally located at the office of the Del Norte Association for Cultural Awareness (DNACA), in downtown Crescent City.

The summer of 1999 also saw an administrative reorganization for the station. KHSU, along with the HSU Natural History Museum and the University's First Street Gallery in Old Town Eureka, became **part of the Office of University Advancement** (now the Office of Community Relations). The change recognized the importance of these programs' service to the university and the community as a whole, as opposed to a specific academic department or college.

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