

*First as a commercial rock 'n' roll station,  
now as National Public Radio with a jazz addendum,  
106 FM has given scores of OU students  
a start in the broadcast business.*



Robert Taylor

# KGOU at 25

BY SUSAN GROSSMAN

## “It’s Morning Edition from NPR News.”

For the many public radio faithful, aside from a cup of something with caffeine in it, there is no other way to wake up in the morning. *Morning Edition* is the leading morning radio news program in the United States as well as one of the longest-running programs on National Public Radio (NPR). It begins broadcasting each weekday morning on the University of Oklahoma’s KGOU Radio at 5 a.m.

Throughout the morning drive, KGOU staff delivers local news, weather and traffic updates.

By 9 a.m. the program schedule moves into a full slate of national news talk programs – *The Diane Rehm Show*, *Day to Day*, *Talk of the Nation*, *BBC Newshour* and *All Things Considered* – to name a few. Reviewing the daily line-up, it is hard to imagine that just 25 years ago, the University-based radio station was but a distant cousin to today’s 24-hour operation.

For OU students of the ’70s and early ’80s, KGOU was the only place to hear the latest in alternative music, from the Clash to the Go-Go’s to U2. Operated by the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, KGOU was a commercial station run mostly by students with back up provided by a handful of professional staff support. The format was primarily rock ‘n’ roll.

By the early ’80s, the popularity of something called public radio was gaining ground. There was growing interest for OU to provide this new radio service, which was founded in 1970 with 30 employees and 90 charter stations. The obvious broadcast vehicle was through the campus radio station. Then-OU President William S. Banowsky appointed a committee of students, faculty, staff and community members to discuss KGOU’s future and decide whether it should become a public radio station.

Their recommendation was “yes.”

In 1982, the OU Board of Regents approved the change. The commercial license was traded for a non-commercial one, and KGOU began broadcasting in its new format January 1, 1983.

During the 25 years that have followed, NPR has grown into a major media company with its programming heard on more than 860 independent public radio stations. The KGOU listener base has grown from a weekly average of 9,000 to more than 62,000. Programming has evolved from a few news and information shows, padded by classical music, to a variety of news, conversation, talk, jazz and blues.

The station’s reach has grown across the state with the addition of translators in Ada and Seminole, and KROU 105.7, which extends the signal into the Oklahoma City metro.

KGOU, a service provided by University Outreach, is now the emergency broadcast signal for the State of Oklahoma, operates 24 hours a day, and has developed its own local programming, including *Assignment: Radio*, the award-winning broadcast produced by OU journalism students. Perhaps most important,

it has expanded its space, moving from its original quarters into sparkling new studios in fall 2006.

### “From the manager’s desk, I’m Karen Holp.”

Daylight floods the performance studio of KGOU Radio on the top floor of Copeland Hall. Windows are everywhere, in marked contrast to the windowless confines of the station’s former studios in Kaufman Hall.

When KGOU Radio moved two buildings south on Van Vleet Oval in November 2006, it was a dream come true for General Manager Karen Holp and the KGOU staff.

Talk of moving the station has been ongoing practically since Holp arrived from Las Cruces, New Mexico, in 1988. She has overseen the station’s transformation from a fledgling public radio service to its current multi-faceted operation.

Converting formats in 1983 required construction of a new broadcast tower and installation of a new transmitter along with new studio equipment. At that time, the equipment was top of the line. But nearly three decades later, it was past its prime.

“We made a joke that if you disturbed the dust, you disturbed the wire or the connection of that wire to something important,” Holp says. “The time had come. We either needed to renovate the old place, which would have made it difficult to maintain our broadcast schedule, or move.”

Although she is not an architect, Holp says that she learned how to draw up design plans for new station facilities, something she has done a lot as proposed spots for the station popped up during the years. While there had been discussions about moving the station to several different locations on and off campus, Holp and University officials were committed to keeping KGOU on the central campus to continue serving journalism students.

When an area became available in what were once the broadcasting labs and darkroom facilities of the former H.H. Herbert School of Journalism in Copeland Hall, Holp jumped on it.

“We just had to move. Every year we looked at where to go. The faculty wanted us out of Kaufman Hall because they really needed that space for academic departments,” Holp says.

The 4,000-plus square feet of new space not only gives the nine-member staff some much-needed breathing room, it also provides space for the part-time and intern students to work. It also allows the station to offer more local programming in addition to its NPR schedule. “Listeners have told us that they would like more live and local programming, like panel discussions of Oklahoma issues and mini-concerts with visiting musical artists, for example,” she says.

Holp’s weekly *From the Manager’s Desk* updates keep the au-

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OPPOSITE: Grace Fredrickson, left, and Bianca Ferrer, both OU student employees, play back an interview for an upcoming broadcast in the production room of the studio.

“The Internet is a companion piece, another avenue to provide service in the spirit of what public radio broadcasting was meant to be.”

dience of the listener-supported service current on what is happening at the public radio station. Messages range from upcoming pledge drives, to thanking graduating students for their hard work, to the station's current financial situation following the move from its original home in Kaufman Hall.

The University provided a 10-year, interest-free loan to pay for the move to the new studios and offices. Staff launched the Expanding Horizons campaign last year to help raise not only funds, but also awareness that the station had grown. Within hours of making the announcement on the air during a special Manager's Desk broadcast, Holp received a call from the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation. Its board offered KGOU \$150,000 in matching funds. Other sizeable contributions have come in from the Anne and Henry Zarrow Foundation of Tulsa and the Kerr Foundation in Oklahoma City. Individual listeners have also stepped forward to meet the challenge.

“We're in the last stages of our capital campaign,” Holp says. “We need to finish it up by June of 2008.”

*“You're listening to KGOU, your NPR source, . . . and at KGOU.org.”*

Always looking for ways to expand the broadcasting reach of KGOU, Holp is excited by the endless possibilities the World Wide Web offers. At a time when print media outlets are wringing their hands over how best to marry the digital age to print, Holp is embracing the Internet. She sees this as another vehicle with which to interact with listeners, making them active participants, rather than passive listeners, of the station.

“The Internet is a companion piece, another avenue to provide service in the spirit of what public radio broadcasting was meant to be, which is based on the Jeffersonian ideal that an educated electorate is a smart electorate,” Holp says. “As an in-



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Station manager Karen Holp shows off the new performance studio, which was on the wish list of listeners and staff alike. The studio will allow for more live and local programming, such as panel discussions on Oklahoma political issues and concerts featuring local musicians and visiting artists.



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Program director Jim Johnson, known to many listeners as “Hard Luck Jim,” sorts through the station's extensive CD library for selections for his popular weekend blues show.



Shirley Shannon

OU President David L. Boren, left, greets Ken Stern, chief executive officer of National Public Radio, during the ribbon-cutting ceremony for KGOU's new offices in Copeland Hall. KGOU began broadcasting as a public radio station in 1983.



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News director Scott Gurian and station manager Karen Holp pose in front of the "wall of fame" showcasing the numerous awards the station has won over the past few years. Gurian is responsible for a major portion of wall decor, as well as the national Edward R. Murrow award from the Radio-Television News Directors' Association he holds in his hand.

stitution of higher education, we are here to provide access to information, the opportunity to debate and discuss, with intellectual standards of inquiry. The Internet, to me, is another way to do that."

Monitoring the blogosphere and making recommendations, soliciting listener input on projects and podcasts of earlier broadcast features are all areas that Holp sees using the KGOU Web site as a companion to the radio broadcasts.

By no means is the regular daily broadcast destined for the relic pile.

"There are a lot of possibilities for the two mediums, and the real issue for me is finding the resources to keep improving the broadcast and explore the potential of the Internet," she says. "The regular broadcast certainly is not dead and gone. People will still use the radio, and at the same time we want to start to develop the Web content to the standards of public radio."

*"This is Assignment: Radio, a student production of KGOU Radio."*

Students, of course, benefit from this period of growth for KGOU. They work side-by-side with editors developing technical and artistic skills in a real studio environment.

And students have always been the beneficiaries of the work produced by KGOU staff. Brian Hardzinski began working at the station in January 2006 as a production and operations intern, which meant he performed whatever odd jobs were assigned to him by staff members. Since then he has served as producer and host of *Assignment: Radio*, produced the station's community calendars, and hosted local news, weather and traffic during *All Things Considered*.

He is most proud of a two-hour documentary he produced examining the present-day cultural impact of the Beatles that aired to coincide with the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

"The staff here doesn't treat me like a student but as an equal and a peer," Hardzinski says. "As a result, the programming I'm responsible for is better."

Following a summer internship in Dallas, Hardzinski says that the new KGOU studios and equipment are on par with the biggest radio conglomerate in a Top 5 media market. The expanded facilities have offered him newer radio experiences such as assisting in live music production and leading an interview with several professional musicians in studio.

"I feel like when I graduate in May I'm going to have relevant, applicable experience which will be combined with a diverse and wide-reaching portfolio and resume," he says. "None of that would have been possible without the people and facilities at KGOU."

The station has served as a training ground for a number of journalists who have made broadcasting a part of their careers. The list of notable alumni is long, and here are just a few: Mike Boettcher, national correspondent for CNN; Brian Brinkley, KFOR News Channel 4 sports reporter and weekend sports anchor; Mick Cornett, a former sports anchor and now mayor of Oklahoma City; and Dick Pryor, deputy director of OETA – The Oklahoma Network.

Says Pryor, "KGOU definitely changed my life and shaped my career. It was a place where students could get hands-on experience, be creative, push themselves and launch careers. I've now been in broadcasting for more than 30 years, and it would not have been possible without the opportunity I received at KGOU." ▀

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