LOGAN—Utah State’s 7-year-old student radio station, Aggie Radio, which has streamed its signal online in partnership with Utah Public Radio since 2007, is applying to the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) for a low-power FM license to send its programming over the air and reach a wider audience.

A low-power FM (LPFM) license would allow USU’s small student radio station to broadcast to an approximate 3.5-mile radius.

“Basically it would be enough to cover Logan City, and that’s all we’d ever want,” said station manager Brady Stanger, a senior international business management major. “We’re not applying for a full-power FM. What we’re applying for is a low-power FM frequency that is only allowed for educational purposes, state purposes, religious purposes, anything basically non-profit.”

Aggie Radio began its application process in May. The FCC reviews, selects and awards permits. It can be a competitive process, as the student broadcasters have learned.

The city of Hyrum has also applied for a low-power license. “Hyrum City filed for the exact same frequency and specifics that we did,” said Nate Laursen, USU’s student media coordinator and Aggie Radio adviser. “If we don’t change anything, only one of us can get it. So we did not foresee that. We thought that for sure as far as in the valley, we’d be the only ones applying for what we applied for.”

Hyrum City administrator Ron Salvesen said the city’s FCC application was a joint effort of the Hyrum City Council with Utah Public Radio chief engineer Friend Weller, a Hyrum resident and former Aggie Radio instructor and adviser.

Salvesen says a Hyrum radio station would broadcast city council meetings and town celebrations. Salvesen said he didn’t know Aggie Radio had applied for the same station frequency, but would consider collaborating with the USU students if the FCC awards only one permit. “It would maybe something that would be best for the both of us,” he said.

But Laursen, a USU journalism alumnus, said Aggie Radio plans to amend its petition to a different frequency to avoid the competition with Hyrum.

Even before learning about the Hyrum application, Stanger said Aggie Radio faced opposition from the USU Journalism and Communication Department.

“They told us not to go for it,” Stanger said. “We decided to write the FCC specifically. So we did, and they wrote us back and said that they have just the thing for us; it was a low-power FM frequency.”

Stanger said Aggie Radio students met with Dr. Thomas Terry, the new head of the JCOM Department, about the application.

“JCOM wasn’t excited that we applied for this,” Stanger said about his meeting with the department head. He said the plans for the FCC application passed through the dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and university lawyers.

“We definitely just started moving forward on that. That was in May … when we applied, JCOM severed all ties with us,” Stanger said.

Laursen said he had expected more support.

“We thought we would get a little more support as far as from UPR itself,” he said. “But UPR went into the JCOM department and, because of their limited resources and things like that, they weren’t able to offer as much as we had hoped for.”
Laursen said he and Terry, who was appointed new JCOM department head in July, began working at the university at around the same time and had to learn together. “Dr. Terry and I are new,” Laursen said. “We both got here this year; we’re still kind of figuring things out. So I think that the future will have a working relationship there, I hope.”

“Unfortunately, I think early on, me and him were just trying to figure out history, how things work, kind of how things operate,” Laursen said. “And then it all changed when Dean [John] Allen put UPR within the JCOM department, kind of supervising. So I think, initially, the JCOM department and UPR kind of always liked the idea of students being involved with radio.”

Terry was also acting UPR station manager until March, while a search is conducted to hire a fulltime station manager and JCOM radio faculty member.

“Aggie Radio has nothing to do with me and nothing to do with UPR,” Terry said. He acknowledged some of the students at Aggie Radio and other student-run outlets, such as the Utah Statesman, are JCOM majors.

“We teach them, we give them skills,” he said. “That’s our only relationship.”

Former JCOM department head Ted Pease, now teaching on a part-time basis, says he is surprised that Aggie Radio feels dismissed by the JCOM Department. “Aggie Radio was created—after many years of effort—as a three-way partnerships between JCOM, Utah Public Radio and ASUSU,” he said. “We have always been extremely supportive.”

“It never made any sense to me that USU didn’t have a student radio station,” said Pease, who came to USU in 1994 and created the JCOM radio production class, taught by JCOM alumnus Will Wheelwright, a local radio program director.

The partnership that created Aggie Radio included an oversight board that included Pease, representing JCOM, the UPR station manager, and ASUSU representatives.

Student fees through ASUSU provided funding; Utah Public Radio provided the online HD streaming capability, and JCOM, created a radio production class to train students, Pease said. A JCOM alumnus provided the funding to create a smart phone Aggie Radio app, Pease said.

Media manager Laursen said he hopes to grow that relationship.

“I’d like to see it strengthened,” he said. “I think that we get great students out of that department that run things over here, and I think likewise we could start to shift students into the idea of enjoying JCOM and pursuing that as a degree and a life.”

Morales, USU’s vice president for student services, said student services has “always been willing and open to talk with JCOM, and that will never change.” He said the two have different but compatible goals.

“The fact is we have our goals and our agenda, JCOM has theirs,” Morales said. “They’re not in conflict from my perspective. They’re compatible, and so communication, I think, is important and I encourage the students to continue to have the communication as needed so that there are good relationships, albeit separate goals and objectives, and that’s fine, too.”

Morales said an FCC license for Aggie Radio would open up some liabilities, but many opportunities for students of all majors.

“There’s always some risk, yes,” he said. “But keep in mind that that’s outweighed by the experience that these young people, these students, will get.”

Stanger, who worked with student radio for eight years at Snow College, Weber State University and now at Aggie Radio, also said an FM frequency would open opportunities for students.

“In our mission statement, we kind of emphasize this is to give us opportunities and experiences and a sounding board to express ourselves,” Stanger said. “I just don’t know why you wouldn’t want to give that to students.”

Laursen said a station would make students “accountable to a government entity.” It would also increase accessibility to listeners. “FM is just one more way to allow students to listen and the community to listen,” Laursen said.

But it won’t—and hasn’t—come easily. “Growth is hard,” Laursen said. “It hurts sometimes.”

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