

WRCM Back on the Airwaves

by Sophia Sakellariou, Editor-in-Chief

WRCM blends old sounds with new technology to bring the station back to life at Manhattan College. More than ten years after the original station fell apart, a group of students headed by junior Samantha Walla approached Dr. Thom Gencarelli of the communication department with the idea to relaunch the station in the fall of 2017.

As of Sept. 2019, WRCM is available to stream online at wrcm.rocks with 48 student-run programs Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. In the face of radio regulations, Walla and her group of music-loving communication students have created a new legacy for WRCM at Manhattan College with a digital platform.

The original WRCM was an official radio station under FCC regulations. Airwaves reached a radius of one and a half miles, prompting the slogan “the station that rocks one whole block.” Students broadcast their shows to anyone who tuned in within the radius as well as on campus in the former student center in Thomas Hall. According to Gencarelli, that circumference was all the station was allowed because it was a special classification that couldn’t disrupt commercial or public radio.

However, that circumference was breached when a group of engineers decided to play a prank and bounce a signal off of the George Washington bridge, interfering with a commercial station. This, explained Gencarelli was when WRCM began to go downhill.

“When that happened the station complained to the FCC and our license was suspended. I don’t think people really understood it was just suspended,” said Gencarelli. “In the time then afterwards the station was just allowed on campus ... at one point that transmission was sabotaged, and that was the beginning of the end.”

Walla is heavily involved on the Manhattan campus serving as production manager of the Quadrangle, editor-in-chief of Lotus magazine, secretary of the Sigma Delta Tau sorority and a resident assistant. When she arrived on campus her freshman year, she felt that something was missing.

“It was freshman year of college, probably Thanksgiving break, when I was meeting up with all of my high school friends,” Walla said. “We were talking about everyone’s experiences at college, and every single person in my friend group was in their campus radio station. We had been listening to everyone’s shows throughout the semester, and I thought, ‘Oh, bummer. I don’t have one of those ... I just felt left out because a lot of colleges have campus radio stations.’”

She explained how Manhattan seemed to lack a community of music lovers unless you were a singer or played an instrument. Walla said that by not having a radio station on campus, a large portion of the student body was missing out on the enjoyment that surrounds an appreciation for music.

Given Gencarelli's deep connection to the communication department, Walla approached him knowing he was the ideal candidate to get WRCM back on the airwaves. Gencarelli thought it was a great idea, and he is now the advisor to the station.

Senior Joe Liggio saw some fliers for the radio station and knew it was something he wanted to be a part of. He served as program director for the past year.

"Any kind of outlet like [WRCM] is a good thing for students... especially at a college like this where I feel it's lacking unity in some aspects, anything that can bring students together in a creative means," said Liggio. "Any space where kids can come in and do what they want, say what they want, and have a good time, is important for a college campus to have."

Walla is happy with the traction WRCM has gained on the Manhattan campus thus far, but has plans to expand its impact. In addition to programming each week, WRCM has sponsored live student performances. Ticket sales from these events contribute to the club's funding. Live performances help make the private experience of listening to music more of a group experience to be joined by many. With the funds raised Walla hopes to continue improving WRCM.

"We are looking to do some studio upgrades, like installing a phone line so we can do call-ins," Walla said. "We also want to become more of a presence on campus, so we want to eventually get played in places like Cafe 1853 or the first floor of Kelly. Right now, we are kind of a community that supports each other," said Walla. "We want to get to a place where students might turn on their computers and tune in at the beginning of the week and the end of the week and kind of use of us as a station to get campus news and stuff like that. We want to be more in the forefront of student's lives."

As many of WRCM's founding members prepare for graduation, the club remains optimistic of its future. Alexa Schmidt, a junior at Manhattan College, has been alongside Walla since her first conversation with Gencarelli about the revitalization of WRCM.

"When I'm fifty years old and reminiscing about college, I want to be able to tune into wrcm.rocks, listen to the music, tell my kids that this was my hayday," said Schmidt.

No longer the station that rocks one whole block, WRCM is here to stay.