

The last days of college radio

New royalty rates make it difficult for college radio stations to stay in business

For those who listen to college radio, it is a unique and wonderful experience as college radio stations, such as KANM at Texas A&M, play music by artists most mainstream stations won't touch.



COLLINS EZEANYIM

College radio stations are particularly known for playing eclectic play lists over the Internet in what are known as "webcasts." All this may change soon if the greedy music industry armed with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) has its way. The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) has come to the conclusion that radio webcasters have not been justly compensating the copyright holders of the recordings they broadcast over the Internet. According to CNN.com, the U.S. Copyright Office issued new royalty rates for webcasters this June. *Newsweek* reports that the due date to pay these bills is Oct. 20. These fees are so astronomical that most college radio stations, which operate on very limited budgets, will probably shut down.

This is a glaring example of the music industry at its worst. By instituting these new fees, the record companies are unfairly eliminating one of the few sources left for original music. While copyright holders of music should be compensated for their work, college radio stations deserve the right to continue operation.

According to Salon.com, the DMCA, which was passed in 1998, gave record companies the right to collect fees for songs transmitted via the Internet. When used appropriately, the DMCA is a fair piece of legislation that justly compensates those involved in making music. But when it is abused, the results can be disastrous. Record companies used the DMCA as an argument for the government to institute the new web radio broadcasting royalties. According to a report issued by the U.S. Copyright Office, the minimum fee for each license will be \$500. But because the DMCA was passed in 1998, this fee and all others will be retroactive to 1998, which means college radio stations will have to pay a minimum of \$2000, the fees they've incurred since 1998.

There are many ways to compensate copyright holders without bankrupting college radio stations. For example, CNN.com reports that under the current system, "webcasters and over-the-air radio stations already pay composers and music publishers royalties for the music they play, based typically on a percentage of their revenues." Even if this model doesn't satisfy all parties, there are other ways to reimburse the appropriate people.

For instance, Wayne Coyne, a musician for The Flaming Lips, which has been the number one group on college radio according to *Rolling Stone*, told CNN.com he would be willing to work on a separate compensation deal for college stations.

In addition to feeding the avarice of the music industry, the new fees have the effect of bullying college and other small radio stations. While webcasters are burdened with these outrageous fees, traditional over-the-air broadcasters are considered exempt. The broadcasting lobby — headed by the powerful National Association of Broadcasters, successfully convinced Congress they should not have to pay because they help to promote music, according to both *Newsweek* and CNN. Web radio serves the same purpose, but has not been allowed the same exemption. As people are listening on their computers, the title of the song and the artist can usually be seen on-screen. Thus, listeners have an easier time of identifying artists they enjoy and are more enthusiastic to buy their music. *Newsweek* reports one webcaster was able to generate \$20,000 in CD sales.

The underlying motivation of the music industry is apparently to stifle the emerging technology of the Internet. The RIAA was justified in its shutdown of Napster, but going after web radio is wrong. Many people turn to college radio webcasts because they want a legal way to hear new types of music. It is shocking that the recording industry doesn't understand and embrace this.

There will be very few legal places for listeners to access new music if college radio stations shut down and that, perhaps, is the worst aspect of these new fees. The music industry wants to prevent piracy, but desperate listeners who are tired of the cookie-cutter offerings on traditional FM radio stations will probably turn to file-sharing programs to access illegal music downloads. Also, artists who produce music that isn't "mainstream" will not have an efficient avenue to promote their work and may quit making music altogether, robbing the industry of much-needed creativity.

The Internet era has provided a means of accessing all types of musical tastes, and college radio has led the way. But unless listeners find some way to convince the music industry and the U.S. Copyright Office otherwise, they will likely squash this revolution before it has the chance to realize its full potential.

Collins Ezeanyim is a senior computer engineering major.



JEFF SMITH • THE BATTALION

Kentucky should not ban Satanism in prison

In August, the Kentucky Department of Corrections (DOC) had a startling revelation — that preceding summer, prisoners had begun holding weekly satanic worship services that were a part of the religious calendar for Green River, a medium-security prison. As soon as the Kentucky DOC learned of this, it ordered the prison to suspend services in order to develop a statewide policy concerning these services. The policy Kentucky needs to enact is one in which prisoners are able to worship the religion they choose, even Satanism, and Kentucky need not restrict the prisoners of their fundamental right of freedom of religion according to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.



BRIANNE PORTER

Those opposed to allowing satanic services argue that the religion promotes beliefs that jeopardize the security of the prison and the safety of the prisoners. In Texas, the DOC does not allow satanic worship services based on that fact. According to an article in *The Daily Telegraph*, a London newspaper, Texas prison chaplain Donald Kaspar said, "We've looked at the satanic bible and are convinced that what it advocates would put our prisons at risk. One of their tenets is revenge: if somebody hurts you, hurt them back." Any person familiar with the Christian Bible knows the Bible also advocates a type of revenge. The Book of Exodus promotes the theory of revenge with the words, "but if there is (any further injury) you shall appoint (as a penalty) life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound." The Christian Bible argues the same belief as the satanic bible. Therefore, if satanic worship is not allowed, it is hypocritical of the DOC to allow Christian worship services.

According to an Associated Press article, manager of government affairs for the American Correctional Association Joe Weedon said, "under federal law and U.S. Supreme Court decisions, correctional institutions must allow inmates to exercise their religious freedom, unless the practice of the recognized religion threatens the safety of other inmates or the staff." It could be construed that

having Christian worship services could endanger the prison staff and the inmates. Yet the DOC does not find anything wrong with the Christian worship services.

The inmates of the Kentucky prison have the very same rights to have satanic worship services as do any other religions. It is because the religion is not as widespread as others that it comes under scrutiny.

It cannot be argued that this belief is more threatening than another. In a similar case in 1995 against the Texas DOC, the Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Texas, Jay Jacobson said, "Religious freedom, the ability to choose one's own spiritual path, is at the core of our basic American liberties," according to an ACLU news release. The freedom to practice a chosen religion is protected by the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment says the government shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion. While it is prudent for the DOC to be concerned about the safety of the inmates and staff, there have not been any incidents in which the exercise of the satanic religion has caused safety and security problems for the Green River prison. Therefore, the DOC has no legal basis for not allowing the worship services to continue. Only in the presence of actual incidents sparked from these beliefs does the DOC have the right to restrict the free exercise of this religion, and such criteria has not been met.

It is from our founding fathers' fear of religious oppression that the First Amendment was ratified. It is not for society to decide which religions are acceptable and which are not. If the people practicing the religion harm the lives of others, is it reasonable for the government to restrict prisoners from practicing the religion. However, the prisoners in Kentucky have not threatened the lives of others and deserve the right to practice their religion. The Kentucky DOC needs to heed the First Amendment and allow the prisoners to continue to practice their religion of choice. The Constitution and Bill of Rights protect religious freedom for not only the majority, but for the minority, including the prisoners in Green River prison.

Brianne Porter is a senior political science major.

High grades should be hard to earn in college

When a student brings home a transcript with straight As, he deserves to be commended for his hard work. According to official statistics kept by the Office of the Registrar of Texas A&M University, 587 students enrolled in the spring of 2002 accomplished this once awe-inspiring feat, compared to only 97 students 12 years earlier. Getting all As doesn't seem to be quite the accomplishment it used to be, which could be a sign of grade inflation.



MICALA PROESCH

The recent trends at universities across the nation are showing signs of grade inflation. An article from the Aug. 25 edition of the *Marquette Tribune* defines grade inflation as "an upward swing in grade point averages without a corresponding increase in student achievement." The Ivy League schools are receiving most of the press on this issue, yet most universities across the nation are exhibiting increasing numbers in relation to GPR, percentage of As given out and students graduating with honors.

A comprehensive study conducted by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in February 2002 showed 91 percent of Harvard graduates graduated with a latin honors distinction last year. These distinctions are meant to separate and honor the top students at schools, but Harvard graduates won't feel honored graduating Summa Cum Laude (which is supposed to represent the top one percent of the graduating class) if they are doing so along with half of their classmates.

These practices are more extravagant at some of the Ivy League schools, but the trend towards grade inflation is being seen on the A&M campus as well. In 1986, the average student's GPR was 2.819, with 30.02 percent of grades given being A's. However, in the spring of 2002, the average GPR had risen to 3.053 and 40.30 percent of the grades handed out by professors were As.

What happened to the concept of Cs being average? Grading systems are in place to distinguish the incompetent from the ordinary and the ordinary from the extraordinary. But an A cannot be extraordinary when 40 percent of students are earning them.

The grade distributions at Texas A&M are even more skewed in honors courses. While there were no specific statistics available on grade distributions in the entire Honors Program, the statistics of the Office of the

Registrar shows grades in individual honors sections imply a student has a much better shot at making an A in these courses than they do in a non-honors course. Grades below C are virtually non-existent in honors classes, which raises the question of why these honors students deserve to claim such high grade distributions.

Dr. Finnie Coleman, associate director of the office of honors programs and scholarships, said high grade distributions in the Honors Program are not indicative of grade inflation.

"When you take the best and the brightest students, strictly in the sense of GPR, and put them all in the same classroom, you have a recipe for success. People often mistake rigor and grade distributions as grade inflation, yet these courses are not easy As; they are designed for people to excel in, as they should be."

Coleman sees nothing wrong with giving an entire classroom full of students As if they all work hard and excel at their assignments. However, Harvard's entire student body is composed of extremely bright students who excelled in high school, and it is ridiculous to give every bright, hard-working student there an A in every class. When you gather the best and the brightest, whether at an Ivy League school or in a university honors program, the standards of excellence should be raised to challenge the students to go beyond their usual level of performance and separate themselves from their equally bright classmates. While honors classes at A&M are challenging and rigorous, there is no sense of competition pushing students to excel because good grades are almost guaranteed.

As this trend increases, average students are being awarded As when they clearly are not excelling in their classes. Mysteriously, as grade point averages are increasing, average SAT scores and GRE scores are decreasing, indicating that students are not necessarily getting smarter — they are just getting good grades more easily. Students work hard to distinguish themselves in college so they can get into graduate school or find a good job after they graduate. However, with more and more people boasting high GPRs, it is becoming harder to discriminate the best from the rest.

Professors need to raise the standards of performance in their classes in order to separate those who deserve good grades and those who don't. Getting good grades should be something to be proud of, not something to expect.

Micala Proesch is a junior journalism and economics major.