

**PENN STATE STUDENT PARTICIPATION TRENDS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF  
COMRADIO NEWS RECRUITING METHODS**

**Prepared for  
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**December 12, 2011**

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Dear Jeff Brown, Mark Wishnia, Catherine Marvin, and Kelsey Penna:

The attached report addresses the issue of low participation within ComRadio's news division, and offers solutions to raise membership rates. The report is based on analysis of primary and secondary research, which was authorized by Diane Galbo, Professor of English at Penn State, and was carried out from October-November 2011.

The research—including currently published research reports, an interview, and a survey of first-year Penn State students—was conducted and analyzed to determine the following:

- Current ComRadio News participation trends and recruitment practices
- Trends in student extracurricular participation at Penn State and other colleges
- Factors that Penn State students self-report as influential in making decisions about which extracurricular activities and clubs they choose to join on campus

Findings suggest that by implementing several new recruiting procedures for Spring 2012—broadening the target audience for recruiting messages, participating in beginning-of-semester involvement fairs, and focusing all recruiting messages to address student motivations and barriers to participation—ComRadio News membership rates will rise.

I am available to discuss the findings with you—and address any questions you may have—at your convenience. Thank you for your consideration of my recommendations for revision of ComRadio News recruiting practices.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Bradbury  
ComRadio News Producer

Enclosure

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ComRadio News—the hard news division of Penn State’s student-run, online-only radio station—lacks membership numbers necessary for a full schedule of programming (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011). In order to achieve ideal participation rates for the Spring 2012 semester, at least 22 new news team members must be recruited.

In order to determine the most effective means of attracting students to join ComRadio News, current research reports on the topic of college student participation in extracurricular activities were evaluated, an interview was conducted, and a survey of first-year Penn State students was formulated, distributed, and analyzed. The findings of the research suggest that three changes to the ComRadio recruiting process may have a significant, positive impact on the rate of membership.

**Spring 2012 recruiting.** As reported in my Research Proposal, “It has been found that after only one semester of college, students perceive social and learning opportunities to be benefits of cocurricular participation. As they enter their second semester of college, many students are seeking supplemental learning opportunities and social benefits through cocurricular involvement (Donahue, 2004; Bradbury, 2011c).” ComRadio has an opportunity to recruit first-year students looking to increase their participation in on-campus activities for Spring 2012. Thus, it is recommended that ComRadio implement new recruiting tactics beginning next semester to take advantage of student motivation to join additional activities.

**Recruiting messages.** As reported in my Research Proposal, “results of a recent survey of Penn State student opinions about extracurricular activities indicate that students see personal benefits, career benefits, and making new friends as very important factors when deciding what cocurricular activities to take part in at Penn State (Penn State PULSE, 2011; Bradbury, 2011c).” Currently, the ComRadio News recruiting meeting includes mention of personal, career, and friend-making membership benefits, but the recruiting sessions lack the vivid detail that personal anecdotes or specific examples provide (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011). If such detail is added to recruiting meetings, students may better understand and appreciate the value of joining ComRadio News.

**Student involvement fair.** Over 63% of participants in a 2011 survey of first-year students say they found out about the activities in which they take part via the Penn State Involvement Fair (Appendix B). ComRadio does not currently participate in any Penn State involvement fairs (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011), and is thus missing out on the opportunity to reach a large volume of students who are actively interested in taking part in activities on campus. If ComRadio News takes part in the Fall and Spring beginning-of-semester involvement fairs at Penn State, the station will be able to inform more students about the existence of ComRadio and, hopefully, spark student interest and motivation to join.

**Target audience expansion.** Results from my primary research indicate that 16.7% of students who are not majoring in broadcast journalism have an interest in “trying out” radio (Appendix

B). Because ComRadio currently sends announcements exclusively to students in the College of Communications (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011), it is likely that some students with an interest in radio—who happen to be in a major outside the College of Communications—do not even have the opportunity to learn of ComRadio. In order to reach these students, it is recommended that ComRadio broaden the target audience to include not only students within the College of Communications, but also students pursuing academic disciplines within other Colleges at Penn State.

Based on the findings of both primary and secondary research, it is probable that making the changes outlined above—using revised recruiting methods in Spring 2012, tailoring recruiting messages to match the motivations of students, participating in beginning-of-semester involvement fairs, and expanding the target audience for recruiting messages—ComRadio News will reverse the downward trend in membership and will grow to once again have the staff to support a full schedule of weekday newscasts.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Problem and Recommended Resolution**

The Fall 2011 ComRadio News team is comprised of fewer than 20 students—less than half the number of members needed for optimal participation rates. ComRadio’s news division has not seen optimal participation since Spring 2009. In order to boost participation, it is recommended that ComRadio participate in student involvement fairs at the beginning of both the fall and spring semesters and distribute information about ComRadio to students in academic disciplines outside the College of Communications. In all recruiting efforts, it is recommended that ComRadio representatives construct informational and promotional messages according to student needs and preferences.

### **Background**

As reported in my research proposal, my research for the past few months has been focused on determining effective means of revising ComRadio News’s recruitment practices. It is my hope that the implementation of improved recruiting tactics will enable ComRadio to solve the issue of low news division participation rates.

ComRadio—Penn State’s student-run online-only news, sports, and talk radio station—was started in 2003 and has been building a reputation for high-quality programming over the past eight years. The station is split into two divisions: ComRadio News and ComRadio Sports. ComRadio News has always been a smaller entity than ComRadio Sports, but the disparity between the two has grown during the past several years. ComRadio News is currently understaffed and has been facing declining participation numbers since 2008; the sports division, conversely, has grown to about 200 members. It is believed that covering sports is more interesting to students because ComRadio sportscasters have the chance to do play-by-play commentary of Penn State sports competitions, which many students see as a cool and unique opportunity (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011).

During Spring 2011, ComRadio News hit a low point in participation, with only about fifteen people on the news roster. Currently, fewer than twenty students are involved in ComRadio News. Ideally, the news division would include 35-45 reporters, 5-10 producers, and two directors. Due to the lack of news participants, there are only three newscasts per week (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) for Fall 2011 (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011).

Less than three years ago, ComRadio was running full newscasts Monday-Friday and was even able to add a Sunday morning newscast in Spring 2009. Catherine Marvin and Kelsey Penna, the current ComRadio news directors, have expressed frustration that

they cannot implement many of their ideas to improve the quality and breadth of ComRadio news broadcasts. For example, in Fall 2010, a "special events" news team was formed with the purpose of covering events on campus and creating content for news broadcasts; the special events team failed to live up to station expectations, demonstrating low initiative and covering very few events (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011).

Problems with attendance (especially among members of the sports division) led ComRadio management to define new involvement standards for the 2011-2012 school year. Under the new rules, participation is strictly regulated and failing to meet standards results in suspension from ComRadio for the remainder of the semester. The new rules were presented at recruitment sessions this year, and students heard the rules before they were oriented to the club. Jeff Brown, the general manager of the station, and Mark Wishnia, the student general manager, want both news and sports to succeed, but they must spend more of their time and effort managing the sports division because of the relative size of ComRadio Sports as compared to ComRadio News (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011).

I believe that revising recruitment efforts for ComRadio News will help grow participation rates and will help station management achieve goals of airing higher-quality programming (Bradbury, 2011c)

## **Scope**

The habits, expectations, motivations, and constraints of Penn State students, specifically, are factors that influence ComRadio participation rates. As a result, data from Penn State students is more pertinent than data from other schools' students or data from the United States student-age population as a whole. Only one of the five sources analyzed in the literature review is specific to Penn State (Bradbury, 2011a). It is possible—if Penn State students do not follow the same patterns as the samples in the studies analyzed in the literature review—that some of the data from the literature review is not generalizable to Penn State students.

Statistically speaking, the sample size used in my survey is too small to have a high confidence level (see Appendix A). The total population of Penn State first-year students attending the University Park campus is 7,339 (Pennsylvania State University, 2011), and my sample was comprised of only 90 such students. In order to be 95% confident that the sample accurately represents the population, the sample size for a total population of 10,000 people must be 370 people (Hocking, Stacks, & McDermott, 2003, p. 225). Thus, my sample was about 25% of the size necessary for a 95% confidence level.

Despite the possibility that the research does not accurately represent the population of first-year students at Penn State, it is more likely that the research analyzed and used to formulate

the recommendations outlined in this document is sufficient and pertinent to the population in question.

## **Sources and Methods**

As reported in my progress report, five sources of literature were analyzed and used to help determine appropriate recommendations for revision of ComRadio recruiting practices.

The first two sources were Pew research publications—the first details young people’s use of media, and the other details student knowledge of current events and politics. The other three sources—including a Penn State survey of students, a study of student community service commitment published in *The Journal of Higher Education*, and an analysis of first-year students’ views about cocurricular activities published in *Journal of First-Year Experience*—examine students’ cocurricular activity participation habits and motivations (Bradbury, 2011a; Bradbury, 2011b).

In addition to the review of literature, I interviewed Kelsey Penna, co-director of ComRadio News. The purpose of the interview was to gather insight and information regarding the history of ComRadio, ComRadio News participation trends from the past several years, and the goals of ComRadio’s leadership team.

Finally, a survey of first-year students at Penn State, which was conducted over a two-month period, is detailed in this report. The survey offers insight into the habits, expectations, and motivations that contribute to student decision-making in taking part in extracurricular activities.

## **Summary**

Currently-published research reports, survey research, and the interview with co-director of ComRadio News, Kelsey Penna, were analyzed in order to draw conclusions about the nature of student participation in extracurricular activities on the Penn State campus. These conclusions are detailed below, as are the following recommendations for improvement of ComRadio News recruitment: taking part in beginning-of-semester Penn State involvement fairs; tailoring recruiting messages to fit student needs and motivations, as well as to mitigate student barriers; broadening the target audience to include students outside the College of Communications in distributing recruiting messages; and implementing the proposed changes for the Spring 2012 semester.

## **Organization**



Findings from research—both primary and secondary—are discussed in this document, and are used to corroborate conclusions drawn and support recommendations for improvement of ComRadio News’s recruiting practices.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Phone interview. Kelsey Penna, Co-director of ComRadio News. October 11, 2011.**

In order to verify specific participation figures, records of current recruitment efforts, and information about management goals, I interviewed Kelsey Penna, co- director of ComRadio News on October 11, 2011 (Appendix A).

Penna described the history of ComRadio’s founding in 2003, and the station’s subsequent growth as Penn State’s student-run, online-only news, sports, and talk radio station. Penna confirmed that ComRadio Sports has had higher membership rates than ComRadio News since the station’s founding, but the disparity in membership between the two has grown during the past several years. ComRadio Sports currently has about 200 members, while ComRadio News has about 20 members. Penna shared that she and other members of ComRadio’s leadership team believe that students are motivated to join ComRadio Sports because they find covering sports to be a more interesting and exciting than covering news. ComRadio sportscasters have the chance to do play-by-play commentary of Penn State sports competitions, which many students find appealing (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011).

Penna also confirmed ComRadio News’s participation trends over the past four years. Specifically, participation in ComRadio News has been declining since the 2008-2009 academic year, during which ComRadio was able to run full newscasts Monday-Friday and was even able to add a Sunday morning newscast in Spring 2009. After that academic year, participation rates dropped and newscast staffs were no longer full for all five weekdays. Penna explained that only fifteen people participated in the news division during the Spring 2011 semester, which is the lowest rate of participation in recent years; ComRadio News membership increased slightly this semester (Fall 2011), and is currently around twenty students. Penna verified that, because of the low membership this semester, only three newscasts per week (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) are able to be staffed (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011).

Penna stated that the goal of news membership is for the staff to include 35-45 reporters, 5-10 producers, and two directors. Also mentioned was the fact that Penna and ComRadio News co-director, Catherine Marvin, have been frustrated because they have not been able to put into action many of their ideas over the past few years; the goal of these ideas was to add quality and breadth to ComRadio’s news programming. One such example was the Fall 2010 creation of a “special events” team to cover events on campus that cannot be covered by the daily news

staff; the initiative was unsuccessful due the fact that members of the special events team did not volunteer to cover events (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011).

Penna also detailed aspects of the current recruiting efforts. E-mails are sent to students in the College of Communications during the first week of both the Fall and Spring semesters; these e-mails encourage interested students to attend ComRadio recruiting meetings, which are held during the first two weeks of the semester. During recruiting meetings, members of ComRadio’s leadership team describe key membership benefits, including the fact that reporters’ experiences in ComRadio offer preparation and practice for classes and internships, the benefit of ComRadio as a great résumé-builder, the leadership positions available within ComRadio, the opportunity to foster friendships with peers who have similar interests, and the opportunities for participation in THON and other special events on campus (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011).

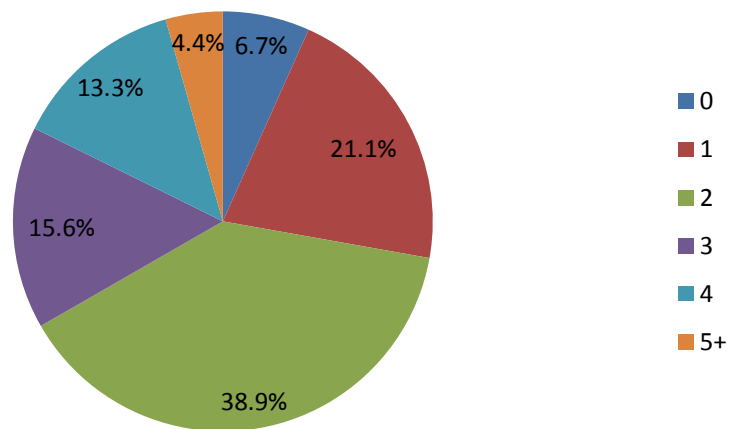
### Survey

A survey was conducted to determine factors that influence Penn State first-year students’ willingness to participate in cocurricular activities. The 10-question survey, which was distributed via the Internet to students enrolled in a required first-year English composition course at Penn State’s University Park campus, was conducted between October 4, 2011 and November 12, 2011. Responses were collected from 90 students (Appendix B).

Students were asked “How many extracurricular activities/clubs do you actively take part in at PSU?” In response, as summarized in Figure 1, 93.7% of students self-report actively participating in at least one extracurricular activity, and more than two-thirds of the students say they actively take part in two or more extracurricular activities.

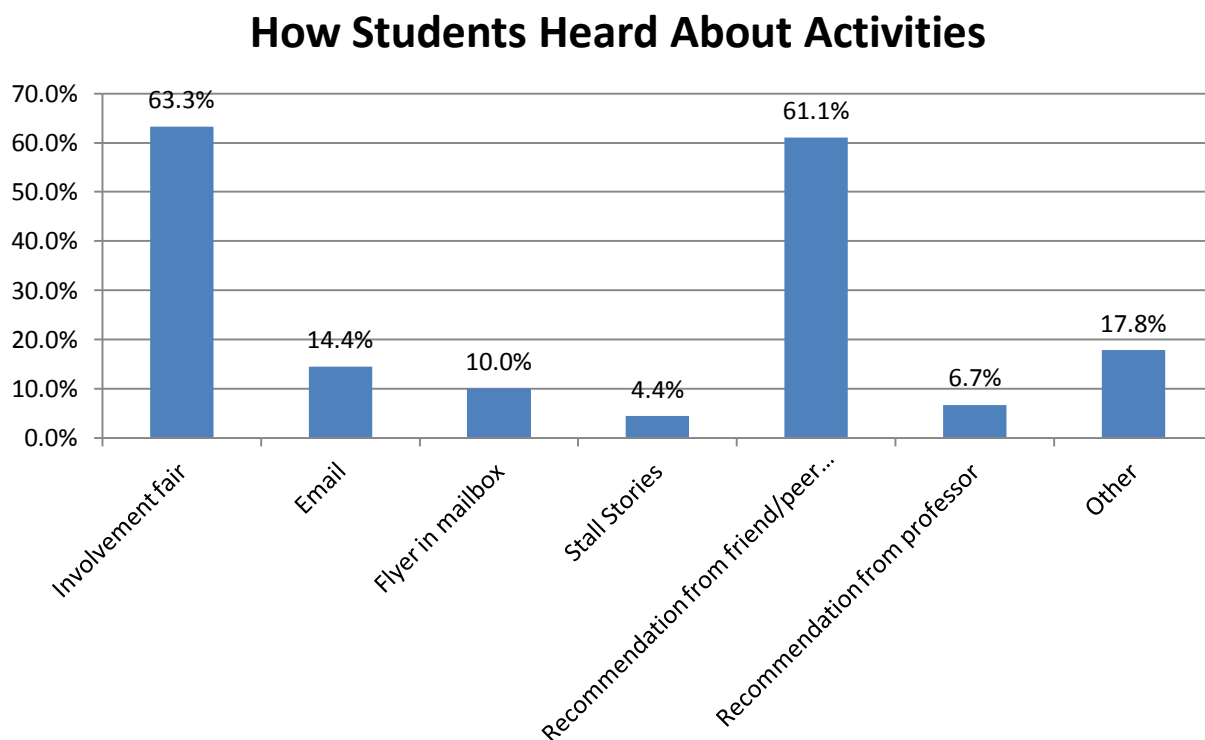
**Figure 1:** Number of Activities in Which Students Actively Take Part

### Number of Activities Actively Taken Part In



In response to the question “How did you hear about the activities/clubs that you joined? (Choose all that apply),” the majority of students report that the Penn State Involvement Fair (63.3%) and recommendation from a friend, peer, mentor, resident advisor, and/or orientation leader (61.1%) were influential sources of information. Only 14.4% of students report hearing about one or more of the activities they take part in via e-mail, which means that ComRadio is using one of the less influential mediums in trying to get the message to students. Student responses are summarized in Figure 2.

**Figure 2:** How Students Heard About Activities in Which They Take Part

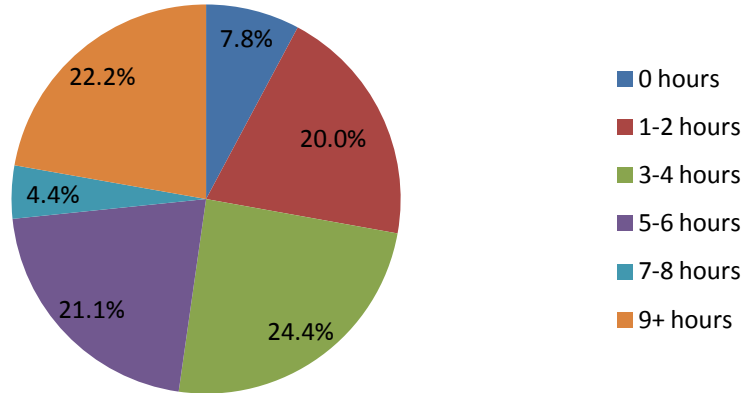


Students who responded “other” when asked how they heard about the activities they are involved in mentioned self-research, searches on the Penn State website for clubs and activities, recommendation from a family member, representatives that came in and talked about the club before class, previous participation in large organizations (ex. Circle K, Habitat for Humanity), a Facebook page, and flyers hung in the halls of residence buildings.

The average amount of time students report they spend partaking in extracurricular activities on a weekly basis varied widely. Of the students polled, 72.2% say they spend at least three hours per week on all their activities combined; nearly one-fourth of all students polled report spending nine or more hours per week. Student responses are summarized in Figure 3.

**Figure 3:** Total Hours Per Week Students Spend on All Activities Combined

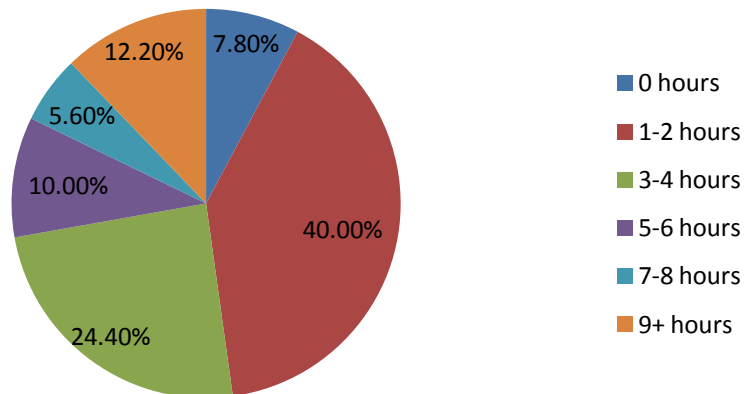
### Total Hours Per Week Spent on All Activities Combined



In thinking about the activity that takes up the most time per week, 52.2% of students report spending more than three hours on that activity per week. Based on these responses, it appears that more than half of first-years students are comfortable committing three or more hours per week to an activity. Since ComRadio is a commitment that takes at most 3.5 hours per week for news reporters, these findings bode well for the future of ComRadio News. Figure 4 further details student responses.

**Figure 4:** Average Hours Students Spend Per Week on Most Time-Consuming Activity

### Average Hours Spent Per Week on Most Time-Consuming Activity

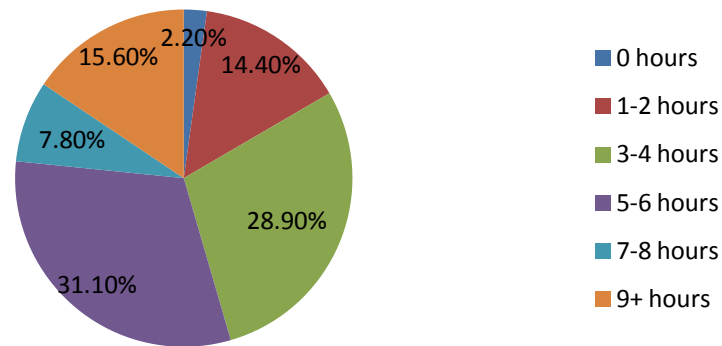


When asked “How many hours would you be willing to spend per week on an activity/club that would directly benefit your résumé and/or help build a professional portfolio?,” 83.4% of

students indicate a willingness to spend more than three hours per week on such an activity, and very few students (2.2%) indicate no willingness to participate in such an activity. Student responses are depicted in Figure 5.

**Figure 5:** Amount of Time Students are Willing to Spend Per Week on an Activity Which Directly Benefits the Résumé/Professional Portfolio

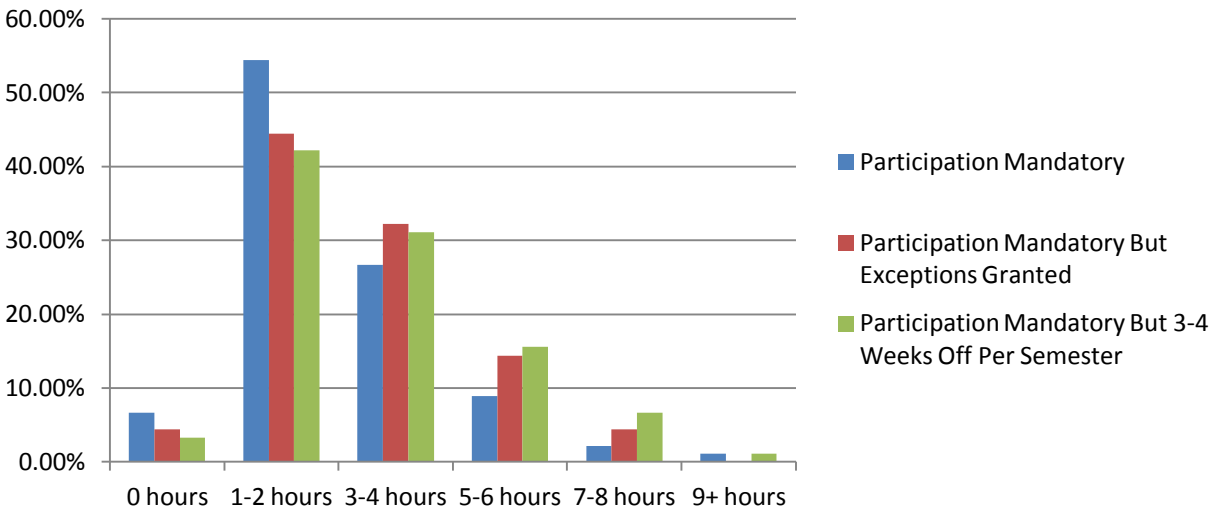
**Amount of Time Willing to Spend Per Week on an Activity Which Directly Benefits Resume/Portfolio**



Although ComRadio News is attractive to students who aim to strengthen their résumés and build professional portfolios, the fact that participation in ComRadio News requires a mandatory once-weekly time commitment likely decreases student interest in ComRadio News. When asked if a strict attendance policy requiring mandatory, once-weekly participation would affect their likeliness to join a given activity, 62.2% of students say “I would be less likely to join the club,” 34.4% said “it would have no effect,” and 3.3% say “I would be more likely to join the club.”

In an attempt to determine if students’ willingness to participate in a club for which attendance is mandatory is impacted by the way in which participation requirements are worded, students were asked three separate questions: “How many hours would you be willing to spend per week on an activity/club for which once-weekly attendance is mandatory?,” “How many hours would you be willing to spend per week on an activity/club for which once-weekly attendance is mandatory, but exceptions are granted?,” and “How many hours would you be willing to spend per week on an activity/club for which once-weekly attendance is mandatory, but 3-4 weeks off are granted per semester?” As shown in Figure 6, the results were fairly consistent, with little change in response based on the way in which the question was worded.

**Figure 6: Effect of Three Different Messages Conveying Mandatory Participation**



Because ComRadio represents a weekly time commitment of 3.5 hours, it appears that the most appealing way in which to describe participation requirements would be “once-weekly attendance is mandatory, but exceptions are granted.”

One of the most interesting survey findings was students’ responses to the question “Do you have any interest in trying out radio broadcasting?” The majority of the students (83.3%) say that they are neither interested in trying radio broadcasting nor majoring in broadcast journalism; 16.7% of students indicate that they are interested in trying out radio, but their major is not broadcast journalism. Zero survey participants report being both interested in trying radio and majoring in broadcast journalism, and zero survey participants report not being interested in trying radio despite majoring in broadcast journalism. These findings indicate that there are students outside the broadcast journalism program who might be interested in joining ComRadio; therefore sending recruiting messages to students outside the College of Communications might be an effective means of gaining new members for ComRadio News.

The findings of the survey of Penn State first-year students reveals several heartening trends in factors related to student participation. Many students indicate a willingness to participate in extracurricular activities that take up the amount of time that ComRadio News requires on a weekly basis. Students show a high level of interest in activities that will help build their résumés and professional portfolios, which is one of the benefits of participating in ComRadio News. Mandatory attendance, though a deterrent, is not a barrier to participation. Additionally, 16.7% of students outside ComRadio’s current recruiting pool are interested in trying radio broadcasting; if these students can be effectively informed about the existence and benefits of ComRadio, it is probable that some will become members of the news division.

## Review of literature

From October 3, 2011 to October 24, 2011, a review of current literature was conducted in an effort to obtain background data about trends in use of radio media; knowledge of current events; and expectations, motivations, and barriers to participation in cocurricular activities among college students (Bradbury, 2011a).

Two sources offered insight into reasons why ComRadio News may not be an appealing activity for students. The Pew Research Center for the People & The Press's "Political Knowledge Update: Well Known: Clinton and Gadhafi; Little Known: Who Controls Congress," published March 31, 2010, showed that among Americans over the age of 18, 18–29-year-olds are least informed about current events (Pew Research Center for the People & The Press, 2011). The Pew Research Center Project for Excellence in Journalism's "State of the News Media 2011" report, published in 2011, indicates a low interest in radio news, as only about 22% of 18–22-year-olds listen to radio news on a given day (Bradbury, 2011a; Pew Research Center Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011).

The other three sources examined the factors that come into play as students go about deciding which activities/clubs to join on campus, and what aspects of an extracurricular activity make that particular activity attractive or unattractive to students (Bradbury, 2011a).

### **Penn State Student Activity Preferences**

The Penn State PULSE survey of students' attitudes and behaviors is conducted annually by the Penn State Division of Student Affairs; the Spring 2011 "Student Activities" report focuses on student involvement in cocurricular activities. The Spring 2011 sample was made up of 1,062 undergraduate students, with a demographic distribution representative of the undergraduate student body as a whole (Penn State PULSE, 2011).

According to the PULSE survey, 75% of students are involved in student clubs....Penn State has just over 44,000 undergraduate students attending the University Park campus (Pennsylvania State University, 2010), so, using the PULSE survey data, approximately 33,000 students are involved in student clubs on Penn State's University Park campus. ComRadio must successfully recruit only 0.16% of this pool of students for optimum ComRadio News participation.

The PULSE report indicates that 88% percent of Penn State undergraduates spend at least one hour per week participating in cocurricular activities during a typical week. The majority of students—50%—spend 1–5 hours per week participating in cocurricular activities, 22% spend 6–10 hours, 5% spend 11–15 hours, 3% spend 16–20 hours, 3% spend more than 20 hours (Penn State PULSE, 2011).

These figures give confidence that the time requirement for ComRadio News reporters—approximately 2–3.5 hours per week—is not necessarily unreasonable compared to the time that students are already spending on cocurricular activities.

The report offers insight into barriers to participation among undergraduates. The vast majority of students (74%) indicate that “academic demands” limit their cocurricular involvement. “Women,” the report states, “were significantly more likely than men to report that academic demands and pressures were a limiting factor but less likely than men to say the same about lack of interest.” Students also give the following barriers to cocurricular involvement: “lack of knowledge” (37%), “lack of interest” (32%), “financial constraints” (30%), and “personal/family demands” (20%) (Penn State PULSE, 2011).

There is nothing ComRadio can do to mitigate lack of interest, financial constraints, or personal/family demands. However, ComRadio can diminish students’ worries about a lack of knowledge by emphasizing training aspects of the program and by reassuring students that participation in ComRadio is a learning process and that no one expects them to be polished in the beginning. When I attended a recruitment meeting as a first-year student in 2008, a student talked about how he sounded awful on air for the first two years he was in ComRadio, but then one day something clicked and he found his “radio voice.” This student’s anecdote was reassuring to me and made me feel more confident about joining ComRadio without any prior experience.

ComRadio can also reduce students’ qualms about being able to keep up with academic demands as well as club requirements. One way to achieve this is to emphasize ComRadio’s understanding that school-related conflicts come up, and to reassure students that conflicts between ComRadio duties and schoolwork can, in many cases, be resolved by doing work ahead of time or switching roles with another reporter. As a first-year student, I was nervous about devoting a set three-hour block of time to ComRadio each week. If ComRadio leaders give students confidence that ComRadio commitments can be managed around schoolwork, students will likely be more comfortable with ComRadio’s mandatory attendance policy.

The report identifies five main features of cocurricular activities that influence student participation decisions. “General interest in theme” was most influential, as 69% of students ranked it as “very important,” and 27% ranked it “somewhat important.” “Personal benefits” was second-most influential, with 61% of students ranking it “very important,” and 27% ranking it “somewhat important.” Fifty-eight percent of students indicated that “Career benefits” are “very important” in cocurricular activity decision-making, and twenty-seven percent say “career benefits” are “somewhat important.” “Do good for others” and “making new friends” were also quite influential, with more than 90% of students marking these as “very important” or “somewhat important” benefits of taking part in cocurricular activities. According to the report, “lower-class students rated personal benefits (e.g., having fun) and making new friends significantly higher than upper-class students” and “on-campus students ranked making new friends significantly higher than off-campus students” (Penn State PULSE, 2011).

During the ComRadio News recruiting meeting, several salient benefits are mentioned: participants gain experience for the future (the work reporters do for newscasts



prepares them for class work and internship experience), ComRadio is a great résumé-builder, participants can work their way up to leadership positions, ComRadio is a great way to make friends with similar interests, and participants can participate in THON and other special events (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011). The recruitment sessions could be strengthened by providing vivid detail specifically supporting each claim about the benefits of joining ComRadio. For example, one of the meeting leaders could say “I’ve made some of my best and longest-lasting college friendships through ComRadio News.” Another idea is to give an anecdote about interviewing for a position and being able to talk about ComRadio.

Additionally, because “making friends” is significantly more important to lower-class students (first-years and sophomores) and on-campus students, any recruiting efforts tailored to lower-class students and/or on-campus students should highlight the friend-making benefits of joining ComRadio.

The information outlined in the PULSE Student Activities report offers valuable insight into the motivations and expectations of Penn State students when choosing cocurricular activities, as well as barriers to participation in cocurricular activities. If ComRadio News recruiting practices are revised to better fit student expectations and motivations, and to mitigate barriers to participation, the station will likely see higher participation rates.

### **Student Motivation for Community Service Involvement**

Jones and Hill’s 2003 study, “Understanding patterns of commitment: Student motivation for community service involvement,” examined patterns of student commitment to community service, analyzing motivations and barriers to participation among undergraduate students. The students involved in the study were attendees of member colleges of the Ohio Campus Compact, an organization that aims to promote social responsibility and citizenship through programming. Students from both small institutions (operationally defined as schools with fewer than 3,000 undergraduates) and large institutions (operationally defined as schools with more than 15,000 undergraduates) were involved in the study. The total sample is 24 students, each of whom was chosen to participate because he/she had participated in community service activities in high school but not in college. Males and females are represented in the sample, as are students from a variety of academic majors. Data was collected using in-depth interviews, with a follow-up collection of data to determine contextual information about the campus environment in which each student operates (Jones & Hill, 2003).

Jones and Hill found that the following factors affected student participation in community service participation: “transition to college and a new community,” “role of

peers in participation,” “institutional influences on participation,” and “programmatic support for participation” (2003).

According to the study, students generally found that getting used to college life required learning new time management, prioritization, and studying skills. The study found that, “an awareness of the need to manage the transition to college caused some participants to put community service ‘on hold’ until they figured out college life.” Many students said they had “gotten out of the habit” of participating in community service after entering college (Jones & Hill, 2003). The fact that many students delay community service until they feel more settled in the university setting suggests that students may be more open to joining an activity with a significant weekly time commitment during the Spring semester compared to the Fall semester.

The study found that college students tend to follow the community service participation patterns of their friends and peers. Jones and Hill noted, “Those [students] not currently involved in service speculated that had their friends been involved in community service, then the likelihood of their involvement would have increased” (2003).

The idea that peers and friends influence participation is one factor that ComRadio cannot control in terms of recruitment. However, it should be noted that participants who form friendships with fellow reporters and with their producer will be more likely to remain in the program. Thus, it is important to keep the atmosphere fun and upbeat during newscast preparation periods. Producers should encourage reporters to attend social events so reporters bond with other members of the station. This may help to increase retention rates of participants from one semester to the next, thus increasing total participation numbers in the long term.

Jones and Hill found that students, especially those at large universities, felt that they had a hard time finding out when and where opportunities for community service existed. For this reason, students at large institutions felt that it was not easy to get involved in community service (2003).

The idea that students feel overwhelmed by the vast number of opportunities available in a large university—and thus don’t know where to start when finding activities they may be interested in—is relevant in understanding ComRadio’s low membership rates. ComRadio advertises only to students in the College of Communications, and it is likely that students studying other disciplines do not even know that ComRadio exists. Perhaps there are students in other colleges or majors who would be interested in trying out radio broadcasting; with the current recruitment strategies, these students likely have no exposure to ComRadio, and thus will not join.

The study examined ways in which students received information about community service opportunities. According to the study, students who went to information fairs

“recalled picking up printed materials but usually did not follow up on opportunities.” However, students cited lack of follow-up from community service opportunity coordinators and help in taking the next steps to get involved after the information fair as one reason students did not get involved (Jones & Hill, 2003).

This information is useful to improve ComRadio’s recruitment practices for two reasons. First, it implies that students get information from information fairs. Second, it emphasizes the fact that student participation levels can be improved by following up with students who express interest. ComRadio does not currently participate in the Penn State Involvement Fair (K. Penna, personal communication, October 11, 2011). If ComRadio participates in the Involvement Fair, they can reach a wider range of students who are specifically interested in getting involved in activities on campus; if ComRadio contacts students after the Involvement Fair, the club will likely see better response rates.

The results of Jones and Hill’s study offer insight into the factors that influence student participation in community service activities. It is likely that the trends detailed in the study can be generalized to explain student participation in cocurricular activities as well. If ComRadio mitigates the barriers to participation—and builds off the supports of participation—a larger ComRadio News division can be built and maintained.

### **First-Year Student Reflections on Cocurricular Involvement**

Lynn Donahue’s 2004 study, “Connections and reflections: Creating a positive learning environment for first-year students,” published in *Journal of the First-Year Experience*, analyzed the reflection essays of a random sample of 138 first-year students. The essays were written after each student’s first semester of college, at the conclusion of a first-year seminar that focused on helping students navigate the transition to college. One of the questions the research sought to answer was “do students perceive that learning happens outside of the classroom walls and that it is connected with their curricular learning?” (Donahue, 2004).

The study found that the majority of students perceived cocurricular activities to have social benefits. One student, quoted in the report, wrote, “the more I become involved, the more I feel like I belong here and am getting the most out of my experience here.” Many of the students in the study appreciated the social and learning opportunities they had taken part in, and indicated that they were looking for additional learning opportunities through their involvement in cocurricular activities (Donahue, 2004).

Despite the fact that this study took place at a school much smaller than Penn State, the majority of students’ experiences and reflections are likely still relevant in the context of a large university. This study reinforces the idea that students are looking for cocurricular activities that will allow for social and developmental growth. The study

offers evidence that students value the benefits of cocurricular activities after only one semester at college; based on the students' responses, many students are looking to increase their involvement after their first semester. These findings lend support to the idea that ComRadio News should increase recruiting efforts for the Spring 2012 semester because many first-year students will likely be interested in increasing their cocurricular activity load after their first semester at Penn State (Bradbury, 2011a).

### **Summary of Findings and Final Recommendation**

After analysis of the published research, interview, and survey results, several conclusions and recommendations about the revision of ComRadio recruitment practices can be made. The findings are below.

1. More than 63% of first-year students say they found out about the activities in which they take part via the Penn State involvement fair.
2. Only 14.4% of students say they found out about extracurricular activities via email.
3. Penn State students see personal benefits, career benefits, and making new friends as the most important factors when determining which activities to take part in at Penn State.
4. Thirty-seven percent of students say that "lack of knowledge" is a barrier to participation for clubs/activities on campus.
5. After completing their first semester of college, many students seek additional extracurricular activities that offer learning opportunities and social benefits.
6. Nearly 17% of first-year students who are not broadcast journalism majors are interested in trying out radio.
7. More than 83% of students indicate a willingness to spend at least three hours per week on an activity that directly benefits their résumé and/or helps build their professional portfolio.

As a result of these findings, I recommend ComRadio implement revised recruiting methods for Spring 2012: take part in beginning-of-semester Penn State involvement fairs; broaden the target audience to include students outside the College of Communications in distributing recruiting messages; and tailor recruiting messages to fit student needs and motivations, as well as to mitigate student barriers.

**APPENDIX A: List of Interview Questions for Phone Interview with ComRadio News co-director, Kelsey Penna, on October 11, 2011**

1. Please briefly describe the history of ComRadio.
2. How many members are currently in the sports division?
3. How many members are currently in the news division?
4. How has ComRadio News participation changed during the past several years?
5. How has ComRadio Sports participation changed during the past several years?
6. Why do you think there are more people in ComRadio News than in ComRadio Sports?
7. What would be the ideal participation rates for ComRadio News?
8. What are some of the problems that are caused by low ComRadio News membership?
9. What is involved in the current recruiting process?

## APPENDIX B: Questions and Raw Data from Survey of First-Year Students, 2011

### Response Summary

Total Started Survey: 90  
Total Completed Survey: 90 (100%)

PAGE: 1

1. How many extracurricular activities/clubs do you actively take part in at PSU?

[Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
0		6.7%	6
1		21.1%	19
2		38.9%	35
3		15.6%	14
4		13.3%	12
5+		4.4%	4
		answered question	90
		skipped question	0







2. How did you hear about the activities/clubs that you joined? (Choose all that apply)

[Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Involvement fair		63.3%	57
Email		14.4%	13
Flyer in mailbox		10.0%	9
Stall Stories		4.4%	4
Recommendation from a friend/peer mentor/RA /orientation leader		61.1%	55
Recommendation from a professor		6.7%	6
Other		17.8%	16
		Other (please specify) <a href="#">Show Responses</a>	13
		answered question	90
		skipped question	0







3. On average, what is the TOTAL number of hours per week you spend on ALL your activities/clubs combined?

[Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
0 hours		7.8%	7
1-2 hours		20.0%	18
3-4 hours		24.4%	22
5-6 hours		21.1%	19
7-8 hours		4.4%	4
9+ hours		22.2%	20
		answered question	90
		skipped question	0

4. Think about the activity/club that takes up the MOST time per week. On average, how many hours do you spend on that club?

[Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
0 hours		7.8%	7
1-2 hours		40.0%	36
3-4 hours		24.4%	22
5-6 hours		10.0%	9
7-8 hours		5.6%	5
9+ hours		12.2%	11
		answered question	90
		skipped question	0

**5. How many hours would you be willing to spend per week on an activity/club that would directly benefit your resume and/or help build a professional portfolio?** [Create Chart](#) [Download](#)






		Response Percent	Response Count
0 hours		2.2%	2
1-2 hours		14.4%	13
3-4 hours		28.9%	26
5-6 hours		31.1%	28
7-8 hours		7.8%	7
9+ hours		15.6%	14
		answered question	90
		skipped question	0

**6. How many hours would you be willing to spend per week on an activity/club for which once-weekly attendance is mandatory?** [Create Chart](#) [Download](#)







		Response Percent	Response Count
0 hours		6.7%	6
1-2 hours		54.4%	49
3-4 hours		26.7%	24
5-6 hours		8.9%	8
7-8 hours		2.2%	2
9+ hours		1.1%	1
		answered question	90
		skipped question	0



**7. How many hours would you be willing to spend per week on an activity/club for which once-weekly attendance is mandatory, but exceptions are granted?** [Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
0 hours		4.4%	4
1-2 hours		44.4%	40
3-4 hours		32.2%	29
5-6 hours		14.4%	13
7-8 hours		4.4%	4
9+ hours		0.0%	0
		answered question	90
		skipped question	0

**8. How many hours would you be willing to spend per week on an activity/club for which once-weekly attendance is mandatory, but 3-4 weeks off are granted per semester?** [Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
0 hours		3.3%	3
1-2 hours		42.2%	38
3-4 hours		31.1%	28
5-6 hours		15.6%	14
7-8 hours		6.7%	6
9+ hours		1.1%	1
		answered question	90
		skipped question	0

**9. If you were told that an activity/club had a very strict attendance policy, and that once-weekly attendance is mandatory, how would that affect your likeliness to join the activity/club?** [Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
I would be more likely to join the club		3.3%	3
I would be less likely to join the club		62.2%	56
It would have no effect		34.4%	31
		answered question	90
		skipped question	0

**10. Do you have any interest in trying out radio broadcasting?** [Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, and my major is broadcast journalism		0.0%	0
Yes, but my major is not broadcast journalism		16.7%	15
No, but my major is broadcast journalism		0.0%	0
No, and my major is not broadcast journalism		83.3%	75
		answered question	90
		skipped question	0

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