

Every year in my undergraduate course on Media and Democracy, I spend several weeks talking about the ways in which independent, alternative and campus-community media organizations embody our best hopes for democratic life. They do so by producing high-quality public interest journalism on issues and topics that are systematically ignored by mainstream media. They do so by providing exposure and support for exciting forms of creative and cultural practice that commercial media ignore and starve. They do so by going out of their way to provide platforms for voices, communities and activists that are marginalized, disempowered and silenced by mainstream institutions. They do so by going to the places where these voices live, and by bringing the people who live in these communities into the spaces where media is made. And they do so by adhering to deeply democratic practices of collective management and organization.

When I am finished telling my students all this, I tell them if they want to see an example of democratic media in action, they should walk across the street and spend a few hours at CKUT.

Radio CKUT is a crucial institution at McGill, in Montreal, and to online listeners around the world. It's a school for democracy, for diversity, for equality, for social justice, for more-music-than-you-knew-existed, and it's open to anyone who lands on the doorstep or at 90.3 on the FM dial. Amazingly, it operates on shoestring budget, fuelled by the passionate commitment of its members, volunteers, staff and listeners. I can't imagine this university, or this city, without CKUT. We are lucky to have such an excellent thing in our midst, and we should not take it for granted.

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