Spring 2010

WSKG Public Broadcasting: Identifying and Quantifying the Need For Local News Coverage

Ava Melissa Rosenblatt
Binghamton University--SUNY

WSKG PUBLIC BROADCASTING: IDENTIFYING AND QUANTIFYING THE NEED
FOR LOCAL NEWS COVERAGE

BY AVA MELISSA ROSENBLATT

BA, BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY, 2009

CAPSTONE PROJECT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters in Public Administration in the Department of Public Administration in the
College of Community and Public Affairs
Binghamton University
State University of New York
2010

Accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Masters in Public Administration
in the Graduate School of Binghamton University
State University of New York
2009

David Campbell
Assistant Professor
Department of Public Administration
April 20, 2010

_____

Pamela Mischen
Associate Professor
Department of Public Administration
April 20, 2010

_____

Ken Campbell
Radio Manager
WSKG Public Broadcasting
April 20, 2010

_____

Abstract

WSKG Public Broadcasting is a non-profit radio and television station located in Binghamton, NY which serves NY's Southern Tier, as well as parts of Central NY and Northeastern Pennsylvania. The majority of news material currently aired on WSKG is supplied by National Public Radio (NPR), a national non-profit organization. WSKG leadership acknowledges complaints that WSKG does not broadcast enough local news to serve their listening community. However, no thorough assessment has been conducted to demonstrate that a local radio news service is needed, nor is there an understanding of the listening community's preferences with regard to such a service. This study seeks to assess the needs and preferences of WSKG's listening community with regard to local news. Recommendations regarding how to address these needs are included, based on the findings of the study.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Ken Campbell and everyone at WSKG Public Broadcasting for allowing me this amazing opportunity while greeting me with kindness and enthusiasm. Ken, your wisdom, understanding, and passion for great radio never cease to motivate; and your guidance and patience have kept this process both enjoyable and productive.

Special thanks to Professor Campbell and Professor Mischen for supplying me with valuable feedback and creating an environment in which exploration of ideas shapes the formation of knowledge. Your methods allowed me to grow as a person and an administrator, and your guidance led me to a greater understanding of statistics, research, and the public sector.

Additional thanks to Professors Alden, Sinclair, Rubaii-Barrett, and the rest of the MPA faculty who has educated and inspired me throughout my years of study.

I must also thank Brandon Ashinoff for his help, as well as my peers in the Public Administration program for their sympathies, peer reviews, and toleration of my constant presence during Professor Mischen's office hours.

Last but not least, I must thank my family for encouraging me to apply to this program in the first place, and for shaping who I am today.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Introduction

Conversations with management at WSKG, an in-depth look at WSKG's strategic plan,

and a careful approach to problem searching and structuring have led to the identification of a

problem in the lack of local news coverage provided by WSKG. While WSKG radio airs

extremely high quality national news programming provided by National Public Radio (NPR),

the lack of news coverage of local community events has been identified as a problem for the

organization. This project seeks to assess whether or not this 'felt need' corresponds to a real

need of the community, and how this need can be dealt with.

Problem Statement

Problem Identification

Problem structuring, according to Dunn (2008), begins with the "recognition or 'felt

existence' of a problem situation" (p. 83) before moving into the problem search and definition

phases. The 'felt existence' of the problem at WSKG could be easily sensed through listener

confusion and complaints as experienced by the management. This gap in coverage becomes

particularly noticeable when a major event or issue is affecting the community, such as the

shooting at the American Civic Association. Such events frequently result in complaints and

queries as to why these local events are not being covered on WSKG. The situation is also

reflected in the WSKG Strategic Plan, which states that "we look to continue to provide long-

form reports on the unique aspects of upstate New York and Northeast Pennsylvania" (p. 15)

despite the cited weakness "elimination of News staff" (p. 11).

After sorting through a "large, tangled network of competing problems" (Dunn, 2008, p. 83) such as lack of funds and limited exposure to WSKG among specific populations (university students and other people under age 25), the next step is to define the problem "in its most basic and general terms" (Dunn, 2008, p. 83). This particular problem is to be looked at with an emphasis on the needs of the community. Since one must know what the needs of the community are in order to address them, this study will primarily be a needs assessment designed to gather information about the necessity of a local radio news department within our region and community attitudes/preferences regarding the various aspects of such programming.

The Problem Locally

Local news is necessary in order to properly engage and represent the community, as local issues are most relevant to residents of the region. This concern is stressed in WSKG's Strategic Plan, which states the priority of increasing "relevance, significance, and impact of content and services" (p. 21). While material produced by NPR is of a high quality and certainly relevant to life in this country, there is a gap in material which is specifically relevant to the lives of individuals in our region such as local events, politics, economy, and health. These local issues are unlikely to be addressed by a national organization such as NPR. Additionally, since NPR's material is all readily available online and through other NPR stations, the service that WSKG provides by broadcasting it is not as valuable or necessary as specialized local coverage that could not be found elsewhere. While WSKG does host a few locally produced shows, the majority of news/talk programming on WSKG is not unique and can be listened to on many different NPR stations and on the web.

WSKG's vision is to be the "trusted partner" of the communities it serves. In order to achieve the trust of the local community it is necessary to properly address the issues which are of specific importance to them. Listeners in a specific region frequently have different needs and perspectives on issues than NPR broadcasters in Washington. This is evidenced by the negative response to an NPR program about natural gas drilling broadcast on WSKG radio. The local community was more sensitive to these issues than NPR's national audience, as natural gas drilling is an issue of particular concern to the residents of our region. It is important that issues facing WSKG's region are addressed with the sensitivities of a local broadcaster, and that local perspectives are represented in radio broadcasts.

Local news is also necessary in order to connect with the local community. WSKG's Mission stresses the need to "engage in thoughtful consideration of news and issues of importance", and as a local organization it is necessary for this goal to be centered on the local community. Reaching out to the local community and addressing issues which are important to constituents is important in order to engage them in programming as well as community issues.

The Big Picture

In a recent study of the decline of printed newspapers, it was found that online sources have begun to surpass local newspapers as sources of global and national news (Price, 2009). However, local news is still commonly sought on the printed and digital pages of local papers (Price, 2009). This demonstrates that while most people prefer to get their global and national news from global and national sources (namely on the web), people still prefer to get their local news from voices within their own community. Despite this, local papers continue to fail

economically as subscriptions plummet, and their increasingly popular websites remain unprofitable. One expert indicated that "there's an information franchise at the local level that is up for grabs" and that they "cannot say newspapers will grab it" (Price, 2009, p. 290). This allows non-profit news organizations such as radio stations the opportunity to step up and fill the void left by the no longer profitable newspaper industry.

While this study mainly focuses on WSKG's broadcast region, the results of this research could potentially be generalized to other similar markets. If this analysis provides insight into the production of local content and its necessity to this community, its information or methods may be borrowed by other non-profit radio stations to create a more locally-informed public. This is particularly relevant as the rise of the Internet has shifted public attention toward more national and global issues. This shift raises the question of whether or not local news is truly necessary or desired by the public, a question which this study aims to answer.

Without Local News

When WSKG does not broadcast local news and only broadcasts NPR content it is providing a service which is already available worldwide, as most NPR broadcasts are available for free online. This creates the danger that WSKG and stations like it will be rendered obsolete unless they provide their community with a service unique to their station, such as local news programming.

A negative community reaction is also a danger of not producing local news content. Without a local information service, WSKG may have trouble engaging its audience in community issues and may alienate its members by not properly representing issues of relevance

and importance to citizens of the region. They would also continue to express confusion and outrage when major events take place in the community and are not reported on by WSKG. This could also have a significant financial effect on the organization. Since WSKG receives a significant amount of funds from listener support (membership/donations), it is critical that WSKG remains in touch with the needs of the community which it is supported by.

Research Question

1. What are the needs of the community (those within WSKG's broadcast range) with regard to local news?

Conceptual Framework

This literature review will analyze concepts present in literature on news media and public broadcasting. This will provide a background of information about the sector being explored in this project; including broadcasting trends, audience data, industry values, sector challenges, and innovations. Identifying the dimensions of the problem, nationally and globally, is necessary in order to properly address the problem in our own community. In reviewing literature on this subject several aspects of public news programs made themselves apparent. First, there was a substantial exploration of information credibility. This further emphasizes the void being left by the failing newspaper industry, and the lack of credibility of online information sources. Many sources also highlight the importance of interactivity with regard to information transmission in the digital age. This is particularly emphasized with regard to public media outlets. Related to this was discussion of the rise of citizen journalism. Finally, literature

 on this subject explored the practical question of formatting and content of the radio programs themselves.

Literature Review

The Knight Commission (2009) theorizes that information is a "public good" which is beneficial to society as a whole and not profitable to many private organizations; it requires a public investment in public media organizations from donors, foundations, and governments. Unlike corporate media organizations, public broadcasters such as WSKG have a responsibility to provide accurate and useful information to the public. Encouragement of "the democratic process and … connections to diverse communities" is a defining characteristic of Kurpius's (2000) 'public model' of journalism, in which "journalists have a fundamental responsibility to strengthen civic culture". In order to be in touch with these communities, public journalism institutions must be prepared to reach out to citizens and take their needs into account when developing a public local news program.

There also exists a theory that public broadcasters are in a much better position to fill the niche left by the failing newspaper industry than their corporate counterparts, who are mostly concerned with improving profitability through audience ratings. While there appears to be a "direct correlation between high audience ratings for news and quality news programming," Treglia (2002) "also found that stations airing particularly sensationalistic, lowest-common-denominator news programming" attracted as many viewers, and that "producing high-quality news was more expensive than producing low-quality news" (p. 190). Because of this disincentive, market forces do not encourage profit-driven stations to increase the quality of their

programming. This point is echoed in the Knight Commission's report, *Informing Communities* (2009), which states that "just because communities need journalism doesn't mean that consumers in the marketplace will generate enough revenue to support that journalism" (p. 15). Investment in news media is rarely profitable because it is "non-rivalrous," meaning "one person's consumption of information does not reduce the amount that others can consume" and "people who do not pay for information can thus make free use of a lot of the information that other people have paid for" (Knight Commission, 2009, p. 15). The most recent report put forth by The Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010) suggested that this will play a large role in the future of the audio news industry, predicting "more options for listeners, less advertising dollars for producers."

Credibility of Information

The tremendous decline in the profitability of the newspaper industry has led to major cuts in local reporting and a much greater dependence on global and national news organizations such as the Associated Press and National Public Radio (Price, 2009). However, this decreased capacity to report local news is not limited to newspapers. There is a growing concern that local television news has shifted toward sensationalism and cannot be considered a reliable information source (Treglia, 2002). This is theorized to be a result of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 which removed the public service obligations of digital information providers, and "common wisdom among the media consultants who advise local stations is that only this kind of coverage will attract viewers" (Treglia, 2002, p. 188). The economic turmoil facing local radio news has severely limited content production, and local reports are tough to produce as

"there are only skeleton news staffs doing FM news" (McCleneghan, 2006, p. 446). Those that

do report local news often "outsource" staff and content from outside of their local community,

resulting in reports that do not accurately reflect the attitudes, beliefs, and values that are present

within the locality (Hood, 2007).

With the decline of newspapers, the Internet has risen to become the most consulted

source of information (Clemmitt, 2008) demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Frequently Consulted Information Sources

(Clemmitt, 2008)

While many consider the Internet a useful and reliable resource, there are serious doubts

raised about the accuracy of information available on the web. This is because many online

information sources such as blogging sites and wikipedia, require limited to no credentials in

order to author content. This information is frequently picked up and redistributed by trusted

aggregators. Clemmitt (2008) demonstrated that "7 out of 10 stories posted on Internet sites that aggregate news items selected by users come either from blogs or non-news sites, such as YouTube" (p. 629). Internet users are not strongly encouraged to fact-check their information, or to scrutinize the sources or credentials of online 'news' sources and blogs, increasing the danger of misinformation of the public.

Figure 2: News Outlet Credibility Ratings

(Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009)

Doubts about the credibility of online news are not limited to academic journals. The Project for Excellence in Journalism's recent report, "The State of the News Media" (2009) highlighted survey results indicating that many Internet users do not consider online outlets to be credible sources of news, despite the "substantial increases in the number of people who said

they had come to rely on the Internet regularly for their news" (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009). This can be compared to local television news (and cable news in general), which surveys indicate to be significantly more trusted by the public. This is evidenced in Figure 2, which summarizes the results of a survey conducted by The Project for Excellence in Journalism (2009).

Interactivity

Interactivity is thought to be of great importance to local reporting, particularly with regard to public media. Kurpius (2000) notes that the underlying goal of public media is to "improve the marketplace of ideas through dialogue among citizens, government, and media" (p.341). To achieve Kurpius's goal of facilitating dialogue throughout the community, a public news organization must be open to interacting with the public on as many fronts as possible. This emphasis on interactivity was echoed by the Knight Commission's report on *Informing Communities* (2009), which highlighted public broadcasting's imperative to "move quickly toward a broader vision of public service media, one that is more local, more inclusive, and more interactive" (p.35).

Not only is strengthening ties with the community part of the duty of the public media, but it can also be used to garner support for an organization and to enhance the efficiency of newsgathering operations. By fostering "innovative approaches to community connections" (Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 2010, p. 28) as CPB recommends, stations can increase their services to the community while simultaneously generating additional community support for their organization. These approaches can include surveying listeners about their needs, being

attentive to forums where they voice their concerns, and providing multiple avenues for them to provide feedback on practices and topics discussed on the air. These practices have the potential to strengthen the bond between the community and the media outlet by providing the media with information about community attitudes, issues, preferences, and priorities.

Many sources emphasize the importance of digital technology in the advancement of interactive news media. Providing content and connections through a website is a proven cost-effective way to reach out to a different audience and through a new channel. One of the Knight Commission's (2009) recommendations for local broadcasts encouraged reaching "local audiences with quality content through all appropriate media, such as mobile phones, radio, public access cable, and [other] new platforms" as well as capitalizing "on all available tools for connecting citizens to local information flows" (p.51)."

The Internet also allows for increased interactivity with your media's audience. The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in particular is quite accomplished in the use of "accessible, interactive sites" (Eid & Buchanan, 2005). These are thought to increase community relations by providing a forum for discussion about issues that are of specific importance to the locality. The Knight Commission (2009) stresses the essential nature of information to empowering and actively engaging the community, and "using digital platforms to engage local institutions effectively in the public sphere" (p. 36). This can be done through the use of online forums, comments, and other interactive measures.

Some sources also recommend that special attention be paid to interacting with younger audiences and recruiting volunteers among youth in a local community. This was a specific recommendation of the Knight Commission (2009) which suggested engaging youth in

"developing the digital information and communication capacities of local communities" (p. 57). This recommendation is largely associated with the notion that interactions with youth represent the future of the industry, as well as assumptions that younger audiences are more digitally-capable than older audiences.

The Citizen's Role in Newsgathering

Taking interactivity a step further is the notion of citizen journalism. This is a popular new phenomenon where untrained citizens perform a role that once belonged only to professional reporters by documenting and publicizing "news" and other information on the web. Allen & Johnson (2007) suggest that the proliferation of this reporting practice is a cause of it being "easier and cheaper to produce and distribute" (p. 388) news without the expense of paid professional reporters.

Citizen journalism is a bit of a controversial subject, and one of the major objections to citizen journalism is that it can be responsible for the spread of misinformation. Many find it "unlikely that unpaid citizen journalists and other content posters, working as volunteers, would have the same expertise, and professional dedication, to providing accurate, unbiased news coverage" as professionals would (Clemmitt, 2008). Still others think that citizen journalism is a great way to engage the public in the journalistic process while allowing organizations to hold onto more of their resources (Clemmitt, 2008).

In an age where "citizen-journalism" is growing in popularity, the Knight Commission (2009) is encouraging "networked journalism". This encourages "news enterprises to reorganize so that full-time staff members act as nodes for networks of citizen participants who cover every

'beat' conceivably relevant to the news organization's audience" (Knight Commission, 2009, p. 28). This model treats the citizens as a resource for public and non-profit stations, not only in terms of the monetary support they provide, but also in terms of providing tips, stories, and materials which public media outlets can use in their broadcasts. "Networked journalism" can be characterized by its blending of "openness with some controls, amateurs with some pros" (Clemmitt, 2008). This type of "hybrid model" is what Clemmitt (2008) suggests will be the strongest as it is balanced in both credibility and efficiency.

Content and Format

A very practical concern for any local news source is formatting. Most stations that cover news broadcast it during what they call morning (6 to 10AM) and evening (3 to 7PM) drive times, the times when they assume that most people are listening while driving to and from work (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009). However, "according to Arbitron data, listening to the radio generally peaks around 7 a.m., and continues at a fairly high rate through the morning and into the afternoon, until about 3 p.m.… it then begins to slowly drop off until the next morning… [and] the pattern for listening to news is the same" (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009). What this means is that "the news [broadcast] cycle differs slightly from the listening cycle" (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009) and broadcasters may wish to alter the cycle of their broadcasting to better match the interests of their listening community.

Another issue with regard to formatting is the length and content of the news broadcasts themselves. Project for Excellence in Journalism (2009) reports that "most news heard on the radio comes in the form of short headline segments, usually on the hour". Some scholars and

radio managers believe that "radio is often the first source for breaking news," citing studies

which "document that the majority of people first heard about the terrorist bombings on 9/11 and

the Challenger breakup on radio which prompted them to turn on their television sets"

(McCleneghan, 2006, p. 449). Additionally, these brief news updates are quick to produce and

therefore better at providing up-to-date coverage of breaking news. Still it is necessary to do

further research on whether the community would desire more in-depth reports on relevant local

events.

Advice and opinion programs have been increasingly emphasized by audio news

providers. Project for Excellence in Journalism (2009) reported a trend of talk show hosts

themselves becoming the subject of news, such as Randi Rhodes, who "got into hot water in

March 2008, for delivering a profanity-laced rant at a comedy club against Geraldine Ferraro and

Hillary Clinton". Once again, editorials and even advice programs are cheaper for stations to

produce since they only require a single talk show host to carry on; as opposed to an entire

newsgathering team and editors. However, whether or not listeners are interested in listening to

advice/opinions given by a single person should be researched before this becomes a major focus

of a public news organization.

Collaborations are sometimes encouraged as a way for public broadcasters to adapt to the

current economic climate. This approach includes sharing or supplying news to other stations,

something which 72% of stations are already reported to be doing according to the Project for

Excellence in Journalism (2009). This is also encouraged by the Corporation for Public

Broadcasting (2010), which add that stations can "organize around shared editorial themes such

as economics, education, the environment, health, and other such issues that receive priority in

public radio newsrooms" (p. 30) in addition to collaborations based on geographic regions and proximity. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (2010) also encourages "partnerships and collaborations that look outside public radio to other content-creating organizations and community resources" such as "online-only news organizations (often staffed with newspaper refugees), arts and cultural organizations, blogs and listserv forums on community issues such as education, health, the environment, and local politics" (p. 30-31).

While the sector has experienced setbacks, there are many opportunities for public journalism to grow and thrive in our changing world. While there are those who believe that the news industry needs 'saving' in the form of federal assistance or control (Price, 2009), many in the industry think innovation and support can revive the sector. The Knight Commission (2009) put it best when they said, "journalistic institutions do not need saving so much as they need creating" (p. 27); and understanding local communities is the starting block for the creation of positive change within local public media.

Methodology

Getting in touch with the needs of one's locality is not only a job for public broadcasters; it is a necessary component of all public or non-profit organization's activities. Svara (2007) emphasizes the "duty of public administrators: …their responsibility to be accountable to the 'people' and promote the public interest" (p. 4). In order to be accountable to and promote the best interests of the public, an organization, or an administrator, must first properly assess what the needs of the local community are (Royse, Station-Tindall, Badger, & Webster, 2009). This

project seeks to understand the needs of the community contained by WSKG's broadcast range with regard to local news, in order that these needs might be properly addressed in the future.

Data Collection

Data was collected through a survey made available online through surveymonkey.com. The survey was publicized online via the WSKG website, in a recorded announcement which aired regularly on WSKG radio between March 26th and April 9th, 2010, and in GAMUT-WSKG's monthly distributed printed program guide. These questions took the forms of multiple choice, ratings scale, and matrix of choices. Some of these questions allowed respondents to indicate why they made the choice they did or provide additional suggestions in a comment box below the questions. These anonymous written responses may be referenced in order to provide some insight into the survey results. For the complete survey, see Appendix A. In addition to basic demographics questions, this survey covered listener preferences with regard to the following subjects:

- **Interest in local news.** Before WSKG can assess what type of local news coverage to provide, it is first necessary to test whether a significant portion of WSKG's listenership would even value local radio news content. Respondents were asked to rate this on a scale of one to ten.

- **Trust of sources.** In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate which news sources they considered to be accurate, and to what extent. Respondents were asked about NPR News, local radio news, national TV news, local TV news, newspapers, and Internet news sites.

- **Format.** These questions pertained to what format of information listeners preferred to hear on the radio. They were asked about length of radio pieces, time of day that they tune in, and time of day that they would be most interested in listening to news.

- **Content.** These questions dealt with the content of the news broadcasts. Respondents ranked the following based on which most motivates them to tune in to local news: "up-to-date coverage of breaking news stories", "in-depth reports on matters of importance to the community", "discussion/opinion programs", and "advice/interviews from experts". Respondents were also asked to rate the importance of the following topics to local reporting: elections/politics, government, economy, crime, media, environment, business, education, and social issues.

- **Interactivity.** These questions dealt with the importance of interactivity to local reporting (rated on a scale of one to ten), and preferences toward different types of interactivity. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of call-in programs, a 'man on the street' interacting in public spaces, an email or phone line for 'tips' from the community, an online discussion forum, and an online blog or stories which allow user comments.

- **Citizen journalism.** Respondents were asked to rate the reliability of "citizen journalists, such as bloggers or other untrained reporters".

Analysis

A total of 260 people began the survey, 241 of whom completed it (92.7% completion rate). Of those respondents, 83.3% reported having made a financial contribution to WSKG in

the past 18 months, 62.8% were over 55 years of age, and 57.5% had a Masters Degree or higher

education level. The data was analyzed using basic descriptive statistics, as well as chi square

tests and Spearman's correlations.

Limitations

While a large number of individuals were surveyed through the online tool, this survey

took no form other than the digital version. Because of this, individuals that do not have access

to computers or are not 'Internet savvy' may not be accurately represented by the results of this

particular study. Additionally, there was a degree of self-selection involved with the study,

meaning that individuals with certain characteristics may have been more inclined to respond to

the survey, therefore making the results weighted in their favor.

An additional limitation noted after the survey had been distributed is the lack of clarity

with regard to the meaning of "local news". Written comments surrounding the first question

(rate local news and why do you give it that rating) indicate that participants were not always

able to determine whether the question was asking about coverage of local news events, or news

stations which operated locally.

Findings
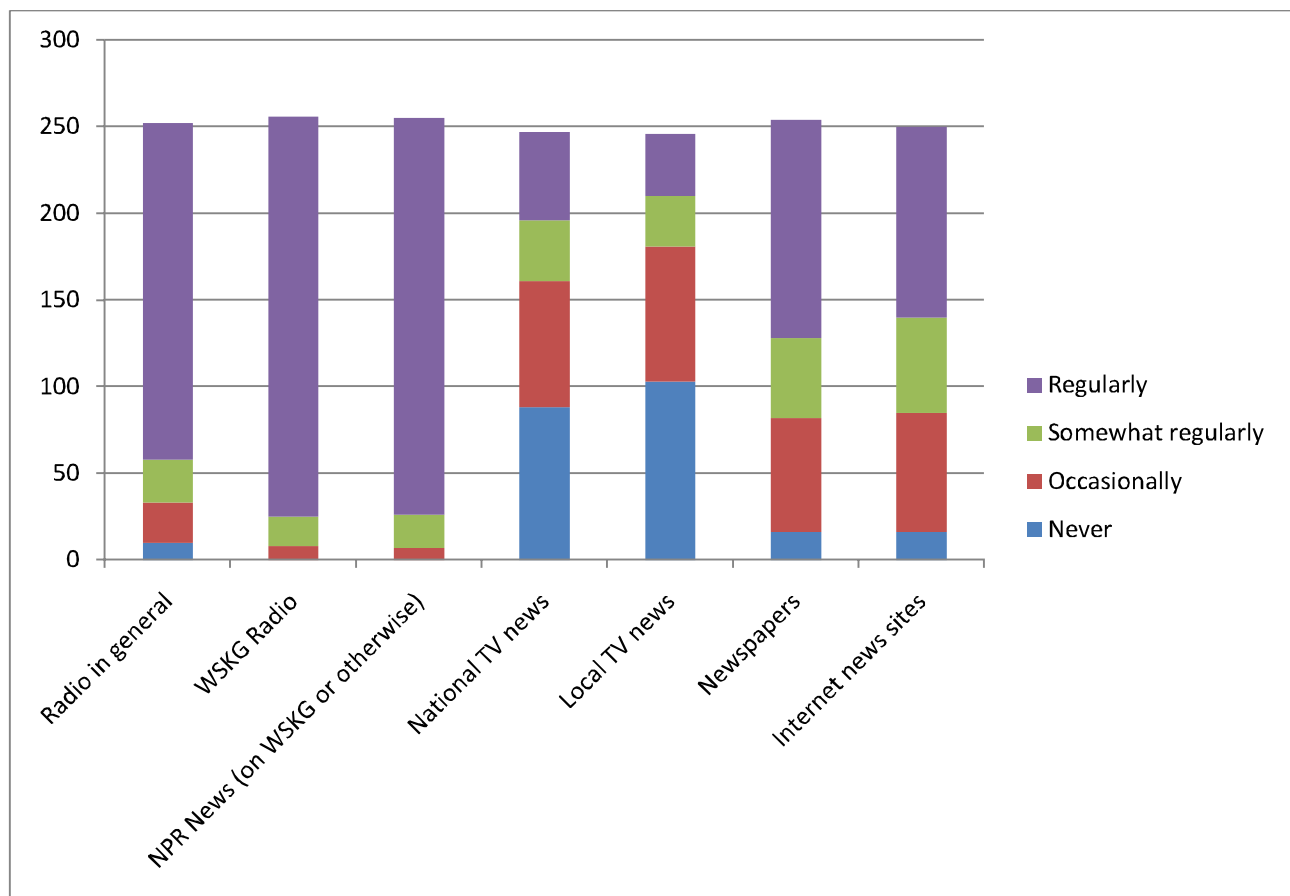
Finding #1: Respondents are interested in local news, and trust WSKG to provide it.

This survey indicated an overwhelming interest in local radio news. The average rating

among respondents for the importance of local radio news was 7.96, and 10 was the most

frequently selected rating. A Spearman correlation test revealed that the news importance rating

was not significantly correlated to the age of the respondents. Additionally, out of 161 responses
to the question "Why do you give it [local news] this rating?" 21 (12.4%) indicated that the
respondent did not feel there was enough quality local coverage available.

This survey also demonstrated an overwhelming interest in radio, particularly WSKG and
NPR programming (see Figure 3). While it is expected that a radio listening audience when
surveyed would report regularly tuning in to radio, it was surprising to discover the large degree
of disinterest that the radio listening audience had in television news, evidenced by Figure 3.

Figure 3: Frequency of Consulting News Sources

A similar trend was seen with regard to trust of sources. NPR News was found to be the
most trusted source of news, with 70% of respondents rating it as "very accurate" (the highest

accuracy rating available). This could be compared to the least trusted source of news, national television news, which was rated similarly by only 12% of respondents. The most respondents (32.2%) rated national television news "somewhat accurate".

Finding # 2: Respondents listen most frequently in the mornings, and prefer an even mix of long and short news segments.

An overwhelming majority of those surveyed reported listening to the radio in the mornings (6AM-10AM) on both weekdays and weekends (see Figure 4), as well as reporting a desire to listen to local news at that time (see Figure 5). The second most frequently selected time of day to listen to local news was the evening. This was a surprising result, as it differed from the results for general radio listening. Overall differences between when listeners tuned in to radio and when they preferred to hear local news were remarkable (compare Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4: Hours of Radio Listening in General

Figure 5: Interest in Listening to Local News at Different Times of Day

Respondents were also asked about their preferences with regard to length of news reports. The most respondents (45.5%) selected that they would like to hear "an even mix of long and short news segments", followed second (32.2%) by "mostly long reports, with the occasional brief update". A chi square test showed that there was no significant relationship between preferences with regard to the length of news segments and either age or donor status (see Appendix B).

Finding #3: Listeners prefer a diversity of content.

While a majority (53.7%) of respondents rated "up-to-date coverage of breaking news stories" as the most important motivating factor to tune in to local news, it shared a similar average rating with "in-depth reports on matters of importance to the community". Both had

average ratings well above "discussion/opinion programs" and "advice/interviews from experts".

Chi square tests and Spearman's correlation coefficients demonstrated that there was no

significant relationship between these ratings and either age, education level, or donations to

WSKG (see Appendix B).

The survey also asked the repondent to rate the importance of a number of topics. Table

1 demonstrates the average ratings of the topics depicted, along with correlation and chi square

tests of relationships between variables.

Table 1.

Importance Rating of Topics in Local Reporting

| Topic | Average Rating | Correlations | | Chi Square |
		Age	Education Level	Donor Status
Elections/Politics	3.12	0.082	0.126*	17.569***
Government	3.35	-0.009	0.224***	8.898*
Economy	3.21	-0.034	0.016	6.691
Crime	2.39	-0.259***	-0.122	1.631
Media	2.11	-0.154*	0.039	4.666
Enivironment	3.18	-0.067	0.045	10.888*
Business	2.69	-0.134*	-0.032	6.385
Education	2.98	-0.165**	0.159*	1.762
Social Issues	3.07	-0.037	0.185**	5.465

Note: Average rating where rating "not at all important"=1, "somewhat important"=2, "important"=3,
and "very important"=4
* $p<.05$ **$p<.01$ ***$p<.001$

Chi square tests indicated significant relationships between donor status and interest in

the following topics: elections/politics, government, and environment. Analysis of crosstabs

revealed that all three of these topics received greater interest among individuals who reported

donating to WSKG within the past 18 months. There were also significant negative correlations

between age and interest in crime, media, business, and education.

Finding # 4: Listeners do not value interactivity or citizen journalism.

A major finding of this survey was the disinterest in interactivity with regard to a local news program. This is surprising given the Knight Commission (2009) and other sources' emphasis on this aspect of local programming. This study revealed that the average rating for the importance of interactivity (on a scale of one to ten) was 4.09, the most frequently selected rating was 2, and over half of respondents rated interactivity a 3 or below with regard to importance. While a Spearman correlation test revealed a negative relationship between age and interest in interactivity, statistical significance was narrowly missed (p=.056). Since response rates among younger listenership were very low, it is possible that a larger sample size would demonstrate significance for this finding. However, without that advantage these findings cannot be generalized to unsurveyed populations.

Reasons for these low ratings were provided in several comment boxes. This includes remarks such as "the problem with interactivity is that you get 100 bozos for every 1 knowledgeable response" and "including more non experts would be a mistake." One interesting thing about these responses is that 7 out of 29 expressed a disinterest in radio interactivity, in response to a question asking *how* WSKG could be more interactive, not whether or not WSKG ought to be.

Another question about interactivity asked the respondent to rate the following interactive measures a radio news department might employ: call-in programs, a "man on the street" interacting in public spaces, an email or phone line for "tips" from the community, an online discussion forum, and an online blog or stories which allow user comments. All of these methods of interactivity received remarkably low ratings (see Appendix B). The highest average

rated of these choices was "an email or phone line for 'tips' from the community". Spearman's correlation tests demonstrated significant correlations between age and ratings for a "man on the street" (-.255) and email/phone tips (-.198). This is surprising as this correlation would be more expected between younger respondents and Internet-related modes of interactivity such as forums or blogs, for which no significant correlation was noted. Chi square tests demonstrated no significant relationships between donor status and ratings for any of the modes of interactivity.

There was also a very clear distrust in the reliability of citizen journalists. The vast majority of respondents indicated a belief that citizen journalists are reliable sources of community information in either few (43.3%) or some (46.1%) cases; while only 2.4% selected 'in most cases". No respondents indicated a belief that citizen journalists are always reliable sources of community information, while 8.3% of respondents indicated that they never are. Chi square tests demonstrated no significant relationship between these responses and age, education level, or donor status (see Appendix B).

Recommendations

Recommendation # 1 (short-term): Seek funds to support additional local coverage.

These findings suggest that WSKG listeners value local coverage, and many of them consider WSKG their most trusted source of news material. This implies that were WSKG to provide more locally focused news material, the local audience would be quite interested in listening to it, and would value it higher than local coverage provided by other news outlets

(web, TV, etc.). Many comments from the respondents even suggested dissatisfaction with the other sources of local coverage. Despite the lack of local news coverage currently provided by WSKG, respondents still rely on WSKG to find out quickly about some local events, weather and emergencies. WSKG can better serve this loyal population by seeking support in order to provide more coverage specific to their region. This can be done by means of a fundraising campaign, or by using this evidence in the creation of grant proposals.

Recommendation # 2 (long-term): Start providing longer reports (4-8 minutes long) on weekday mornings; and be prepared to provide short brief updates on important breaking news as it occurs.

An overwhelming majority of those surveyed indicated that they not only listen to the radio on weekday mornings, but they would prefer to hear local news aired at this time. Similar, although less overwhelming, results were found regarding weekend mornings as well. This corresponds to the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2009)'s findings that radio listenership peaks in the mornings, and that news is commonly aired around that time as well.

WSKG listeners seem evenly split between preferring long, in-depth reports on matters of importance to the community, and quick updates on breaking news. Of these two, there is no one direction which should be taken, but it is important to provide a balance. Since long, in-depth reports are generally less time-sensitive than immediately breaking stories, these can be scheduled in the morning when listeners will be mostly likely to take an interest. Urgent and immediately breaking stories can be aired irregularly as they become relevant.

Recommendations # 3 (long-term): Cover a diversity of topics.

Most topics were rated of a high importance on average. Since all of these topics appear to be similarly valued by WSKG's audience, it is important that WSKG not significantly favor one of these topics with their coverage of local events and issues. While crime and media received the lowest importance ratings of all the topics, they were correlated with younger audiences, which WSKG may be particularly interested in reaching out to. Additionally, 7 out of the 9 topics covered in the survey were correlated with one or more listener characteristics (age, donor status, etc.). This indicates that favoring one topic over another could alienate a portion of WSKG's listenership, if they feel that their interests are not being reflected in the station's coverage.

Recommendation # 4 (long-term): Set up an email account for 'tips' from the community, but do not overly emphasize interactivity or rely on citizen journalists.

This survey made clear that listeners in our community have little interest in interacting with their sources of news, and are uninterested in hearing what "non-experts" such as callers, commenters, and "citizen journalists" think about the issues. Because of this, WSKG should avoid heavily focusing on interactivity or relying on citizen journalists as sources of information. While all methods of interacting with the community were rated by respondents as being of little importance, the highest rated method was the email or phone line for 'tips' from the community. Since email accounts are fairly simple to monitor, this may be a worthwhile effort. Additionally, since these emails will be reviewed by professional journalist before receiving any on-air

attention, there is little risk that the airwaves will become dominated by the discourse of opinionated amateurs.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated a void in the WSKG's listening audience's access to locally-focused radio news, and many respondents suggested dissatisfaction with the local coverage being provided by television, newspapers and other information sources. This supports Price's (2009) implication that there is a local niche that is "up for grabs" yet unavailable to the failing for-profit newspaper industry. While this survey was mostly taken by frequent radio listeners, the findings still suggest a strong interest in local coverage in addition to the usual NPR-supplied national coverage. The next step for WSKG is to find cost-effective ways to address this need in the community, while taking into account the recommendations of this study.

References

Allen, R.B. & Johnson, K.A. (2007). Preserving digital local news. *Electronic Library, vol. 26* (3), pp. 387-399.

Clemmitt, M. (2008). Internet accuracy: Is information on the Web reliable? *CQ Researcher, vol. 18* (27), pp. 625-648.

Corporation for Public Broadcasting. (2010). *Public radio in the new network age: Report and recommendations of the Public Radio Audience Growth Task Force.* Takoma Park, MD: Station Resource Group.

Dunn, W. (2008). *Public policy analysis: An introduction.* 4th Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Eid, M. & Buchanan, C. (2005). North America: Multiplying media in a dynamic landscape. *First Monday, vol. 10* (11).

Hood, L. (2007). Radio reverb: The impact of "local" news reimported to its own community. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, vol. 51* (1), pp. 1-19.

The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy. (2009).

    Informing communities: Sustaining democracy in the digital age. Washington, D.C.: The

    Aspen Institute.

Kurpius, D.D. (2000). Public journalism and commercial local television news: In search of a

    model. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, vol. 77* (2), pp. 340-355.

McCleneghan, J.S. (2006). FM local newscasts in the Southwest: A disappearing service. *The*

    Social Science Journal, vol. 43, pp. 445-451.

Price, T. (2009). Future of journalism: Will newspapers' decline weaken democracy? *CQ*

    Reseacher, vol. 19 (13), pp. 273-296.

Project for Excellence in Journalism. (2010). State of the news media. Retrieved April 16, 2010

    from Project for Excellence in Journalism's website: http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2010/

Project for Excellence in Journalism. (2009). State of the news media. Retrieved April 16, 2010

    from Project for Excellence in Journalism's website: http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2009/

Royse, D., Station-Tindall, M., Badger, K., & Webster, M. (2009). *Needs assessment.* New

    York, NY: Oxford University press.

Svara, James. (2007) .*The ethics primer*. Sudbury, Massachusetts: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.

Treglia, S.P. (2002). Changing channels: How the nonprofit sector can help improve local television news. *National Civic Review, vol. 91* (2), pp. 185-192.

Appendix A

The Survey

Informed Consent Page

*1. HELLO-- I am a student at Binghamton University currently collaborating with WSKG Public Broadcasting. We are conducting research in the form of a survey in order to better understand the needs of our listening community. Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with Binghamton University or WSKG Public Broadcasting. If you decide to participate, you are not obligated to answer all questions, and may stop at any time. If you agree, I would like to ask you some questions about you and your preferences as they relate to public broadcasting, news, and media in general. The survey should take 10 minutes. Your responses are confidential and anonymous.

Do you agree to take this survey under these conditions?

_ I agree.
_ I do not agree.

The Survey

1. Rate the importance of local radio news on a scale of 1-10 (1 being the least important, and 10 being most important).

__1   __2   __3   __4   __5   __6   __7   __8   __9   __10

Why do you give it that rating?

_____
_____
_____

2. How often do you read/watch/listen to the following:

Radio in general
__Never   __Occasionally   __Somewhat regularly   __Regularly

WSKG Radio
__Never   __Occasionally   __Somewhat regularly   __Regularly

NPR News (on WSKG or otherwise)
__Never   __Occasionally   __Somewhat regularly   __Regularly

National TV news
__Never   __Occasionally   __Somewhat regularly   __Regularly

Local TV news
__Never   __Occasionally   __Somewhat regularly   __Regularly

Newspapers
__Never   __Occasionally   __Somewhat regularly   __Regularly

Internet news sites
__Never   __Occasionally   __Somewhat regularly   __Regularly

3. Howe accurate do you find the following sources of news:

NPR News
__ Not at all accurate   __Somewhat accurate   __Accurate   __Very accurate   __No opinion

Local radio news
__ Not at all accurate   __Somewhat accurate   __Accurate   __Very accurate   __No opinion

National TV news
__ Not at all accurate   __Somewhat accurate   __Accurate   __Very accurate   __No opinion

Local TV news
__ Not at all accurate   __Somewhat accurate   __Accurate   __Very accurate   __No opinion

Newspapers
__ Not at all accurate   __Somewhat accurate   __Accurate   __Very accurate   __No opinion

Internet news sites
__ Not at all accurate   __Somewhat accurate   __Accurate   __Very accurate   __No opinion

4. Which are you most interested in hearing on the radio?
___ Long, detailed news reports (approx. 10 minutes)
___ Short, brief news updates (approx. 30 seconds)
___ Mostly long reports, with the occasional brief update
___ Mostly brief updates, with the occasional in-depth report
___ An even mix of long and short news segments

5. Rank the following according to which most motivates you to tune in to local news. (one answer per column, one answer per row)

Up-to-date coverage of breaking news stories
___ Most important   ___ Second most important   ___ Third most important   ___Least important

In-depth reports on matters of importance to the community
___ Most important   ___ Second most important   ___ Third most important   ___Least important

Discussion/opinion programs
___ Most important   ___ Second most important   ___ Third most important   ___Least important

Advice/interviews from experts
___ Most important   ___ Second most important   ___ Third most important   ___Least important

6. What times of day do you normally tune in to the radio? (check all that apply)

On weekdays
__Morning (6AM- 10AM)   __Mid-day (10AM- 2PM)   __Afternoon (2PM- 6PM)
    __Evening (6PM- 10PM)   __Night (10PM and later)

On weekends
__Morning (6AM- 10AM)   __Mid-day (10AM- 2PM)   __Afternoon (2PM- 6PM)
    __Evening (6PM- 10PM)   __Night (10PM and later)

7. What times of day would you be most interested in listening to local news? (check all that apply)

On weekdays
__Morning (6AM- 10AM)   __Mid-day (10AM- 2PM)   __Afternoon (2PM- 6PM)
    __Evening (6PM- 10PM)   __Night (10PM and later)

On weekends
__Morning (6AM- 10AM)   __Mid-day (10AM- 2PM)   __Afternoon (2PM- 6PM)
      __Evening (6PM- 10PM)   __Night (10PM and later)

8. Rate the importance of the following topics in local reporting:

Elections/Politics
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

Government
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

Economy
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

Crime
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

Media
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

Environment
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

Business
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

Education
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

Social Issues
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

Is there another topic you think should be covered by local media?

_____

_____

_____

9. Many radio shows are interactive. How important are the following to you for local news programming?

Call-in programs
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

A "man on the street" interacting in public spaces
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

An email or phone line for "tips" from the community
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

An online discussion forum
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

An online blog or stories which allow user comments
__ Not at all important __Somewhat important __Important __Very important

Any other ideas on how a program could be interactive?

_____

_____

_____

10. How important is interactivity to a local radio news program? Please rate on a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most important).

__1   __2   __3   __4   __5   __6   __7   __8   __9   __10

Why do you give it that rating?

_____

_____

_____

11. Do you think 'citizen journalists', such as bloggers or other untrained reporters, are reliable sources of community information?
__ Never
__In few cases
__In some cases
__In most cases
__Always

12. Please indicate your gender.
__ Male
__Female

13. What age range do you fall into?
__ 18-24 years old
__25-34 years old
__35-44 years old
__45-54 years old
__55-64 years old
__65-74 years old
__75 years or older

14. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

__ Some High School
__ High School Diploma/GED
__ Some College
__ 2-year College Degree (Associates)
__ 4-year College Degree (BA, BS)
__ Masters Degree
__ Doctoral Degree
__ Professional Degree (MD, JD)

15. Have you made a financial contribution to WSKG in the past 18 months?
__ Yes
__ No

Appendix B

Additional Correlations

Importance Ranking of Motivating Factors to Listen to Local Radio News

		Correlations		Chi Square
Topic	Average Rating	Age	Education Level	Donor Status
Up-to-date coverage of breaking news stories	3.29	0.011	-0.011	0.94
In-depth reports on matters of importance to the community	3.25	-0.014	0.062	1.708
Discussion/opinion programs	1.81	0.122	-0.02	5.266
Advice/interview with experts	1.73	-0.107	0.011	4.453

Note: Average rating where rating "least important"=1, "third most important"=2, "second most important"=3, and "most important"=4
* p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Importance Rating of Methods of Interactivity

		Correlations		Chi Square
Topic	Average Rating	Age	Education Level	Donor Status
Call-in programs	1.650	-0.118	-0.008	1.250
A "man on the street" interacting in public spaces	1.480	-0.255***	-0.002	3.663
An email or phone line for "tips" from the community	1.930	-0.198**	0.020	2.453
An online discussion forum	1.710	0.013	0.002	0.735
An online blog or stories which allow user comments	1.690	-0.051	0.420	2.005

Note: Average rating where rating "not at all important"=1, "somewhat important"=2, "important"=3, and "very important"=4
* p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Other Preferences

| | | Chi Square Correlations | |
Preference	Age	Education Level	Donor Status
Length of report	18.104	14.793	1.804
Citizen journalism	13.002	16.018	1.763

Note: * p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Appendix C

IRB Approval

Date: March 23, 2010

To: Ava Rosenblatt, Public Administration

From: Anne M. Casella, CIP Administrator

                 Human Subjects Research Review Committee

Subject: Human Subjects Research Approval

                 Protocol Number: 1383-10

                 Protocol title: *WSKG Public Broadcasting and Local News Capstone*

Your project identified above was reviewed by the HSRRC and has received an Exempt approval pursuant to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations, 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) .

An exempt status signifies that you will not be required to submit a Continuing Review application as long as your project involving human subjects remains unchanged. If your project undergoes any changes these changes must be reported to our office prior to implementation, using the form listed below:
http://humansubjects.binghamton.edu/2009_Forms/012_Modification%20Form.rtf

Any unanticipated problems and/or complaints related to your use of human subjects in this project must be reported, using the form listed below,
http://humansubjects.binghamton.edu/Forms/Forms/Adverse%20Event%20Form.rtf and delivered to the Human Subjects Research Review Office within five days. This is required so that the HSRRC can institute or update protective measures for human subjects as may be necessary. In addition, under the University's Assurance with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Binghamton University must report certain events to the federal

government. These reportable events include deaths, injuries, adverse reactions or unforeseen risks to human subjects. These reports must be made regardless of the source of funding or exempt status of your project.

University policy requires you to maintain as a part of your records, any documents pertaining to the use of human subjects in your research. This includes any information or materials conveyed to, and received from, the subjects, as well as any executed consent forms, data and analysis results. These records must be maintained for at least six years after project completion or termination. If this is a funded project, you should be aware that these records are subject to inspection and review by authorized representative of the University, State and Federal governments.

Please notify this office when your project is complete by completing and forwarding to our office the following form:
http://humansubjects.binghamton.edu/Forms/Forms/Protocol%20Closure%20Form.rtf

Upon notification we will close the above referenced file. Any reactivation of the project will require a new application.

This documentation is being provided to you via email. A hard copy will not be mailed unless you request us to do so.

Thank you for your cooperation, I wish you success in your research, and please do not hesitate to contact our office if you have any questions or require further assistance.

cc: file

Pamela Mischen

Diane Bulizak, Secretary
Human Subjects Research Review Office
Biotechnology Building, Room 2205
85 Murray Hill Rd.
Vestal, NY 13850
dbulizak@binghamton.edu
Telephone: (607) 777-3818
Fax: (607) 777-5025