



**ALUMNI PROPOSAL TO THE ADMINISTRATION:**

**PREFERRED OPTION TO RESOLVING THE WRAS SITUATION**

June 25, 2014

Dear Dr. Becker,

Thank you for your consideration of our proposal. This preliminary draft represents what we could pull together in less than two weeks since we last spoke. Our plan is to work with your administration to refine and expand our strategic direction while collecting additional data points for this proposal from the alumni. We have worked hard these past few days to assemble a value proposition that, while **preliminary**, is a strong representation of our capabilities. We look forward to refining and expanding this plan in concert with your administration in the next several days.

## BACKGROUND

Album 88 Alumni (A88A) seeks to preserve student-controlled radio programming at Georgia State University's WRAS-Atlanta 88.5 FM (Album 88) by serving as an advocate for the nation's first 100,000-watt student-run college radio station, strengthening the bond between alumni and current students for their benefit and providing an association for former Album 88 staff everywhere.

### The GSU/GPB Agreement

Our observation, which is congruent with observations by the community, the media, and the students, is that the inclusion of WRAS in the GPB agreement was the wrong strategy for achieving the university's long term objectives; and that the Album 88 brand, four generations strong, is mission-critical to GSU, and should not be negotiated away. Also, for GPB to try to re-brand WRAS as an NPR station and wipe away the Album 88 brand will be disastrous for both GPB and GSU.

Our expectation is to work with GSU's administration to chart a path by which WRAS is removed from the table in any remaining dealings with GPB, and the student-run station continues to broadcast its student-controlled programming around the clock. We endorse the WRAS student management's *Ten Year Plan* and are committed to helping students develop and implement the plan.

GSU's and A88A's interests are aligned: We both want to enhance the educational experience GSU provides its students and to increase real world opportunities for GSU graduates. Where we differ is in the strategy of taking away student-controlled broadcast airtime for 14 hours each day.

## Album 88: The Brand

The student-run, music-centric programming of Album 88 remains extremely relevant to its local audience and to the national music industry it nurtures as an alternative music outlet.

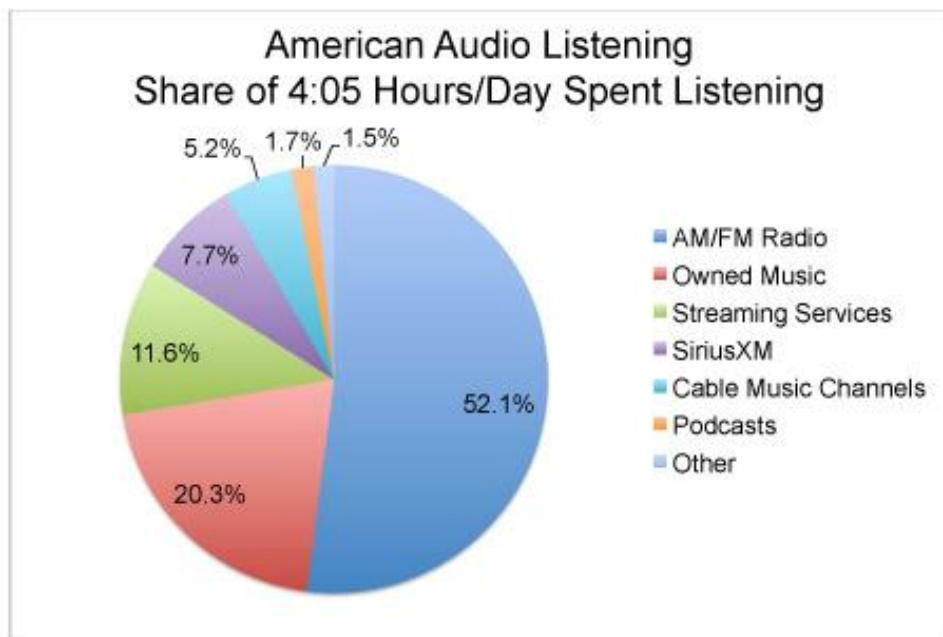
After four decades of Album 88 amassing this brand recognition, GPB will find it very hard and, likely impossible, to try and displace the brand from 88.5 FM.

Trading the tested and proven Album 88 brand (with its solid 76K+ listenership) for a speculative cable channel and vague internship offers does not make sense to the listening public, nor to industry experts, students, and alumni.

### Music Discovery:

Broadcast radio continues to serve an important role for the music industry's sustainability. Album 88's average 76K+ listeners represent an important stronghold for the nation's premier college radio station; and as a destination on the radio dial, Album 88 itself represents an important music discovery tool in the market.

Edison Research has recently reported how - and how much - Americans listen to music. Edison Research says Americans listen to four hours and five minutes of audio each day. This pie chart was published by Billboard on June 18, 2014. As stated in the report, "broadcast radio accounted for 52% of all listening time, or just over two hours per day. That figure includes time spent listening to online simulcasts from AM or FM stations. Broadcast radio's place as most favored audio format isn't a surprise. About 92% of Americans age 12 and over listen to broadcast radio, according to Arbitron."



It is for this reason that our efforts were endorsed last week by The Atlanta Chapter of The Recording Academy (Grammy); Georgia Music Partners (GMP); The Music Business Association (previously NARM); and National Association of Recording Industry Professionals (NARIP).

And it is for this reason that almost 12,000 listeners and fans of the station have [petitioned](#) to stop the GPB takeover<sup>1</sup>.

As the pie chart shows, cable channel music listenership is dwarfed by other activities. It is therefore unlikely that Album 88 programming for GPB would have more viewership than Album 88 programming on WRAS has listenership.

It is not worth destroying the existing powerful brand of Album 88 in favor of uncertain viewership on a new, secondary TV channel that is dedicated to children’s programming during the day.

## Our Proposal’s Summary

**Our proposal to GSU has superior benefits for GSU compared to the GPB offer.** Our proposal consists of the following sections, which address the administration’s goals with respect to the GPB partnership, as you had articulated to us directly and to the press in numerous interviews. While we are focused on TV students, our reach could accommodate a broader program for the entire Department of Communication. We are presently ignoring some of those opportunities due to your specific focus on providing additional opportunities to TV broadcasting students. If the administration’s position changes on this, we would be glad to address a more comprehensive package that targets the entire Department of Communication, including radio- and film-centric students.

### 1. Enhancing student training programs – internships, mentorships, networking and coaching:

Program	GPB	A88A
Internship Program	Unspecified Opportunities	Over 100 Opportunities
Mentorship Program	None	Over 70 Mentors
Networking Program	None	Over 70 Peers

**2. Providing alternatives to the GPB takeover that allow all stakeholders to achieve their goals simultaneously:** We will discuss the proposed **GSU access to TV distribution opportunities** - and the Department of Communication’s ability to fulfill its part of the GPB agreement; we will compare the reach and nature of cable TV vs. radio broadcasting; and we will propose technical alternatives

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.change.org/petitions/georgia-state-university-stop-georgia-public-broadcasting-s-takeover-of-iconic-atlanta-college-radio-station-album-88-wras-88-5-fm>

to the situation at hand that are attainable and allow all parties—GSU, GPB, the students and the alumni—to get what they want and need.

We look forward to your response and to working with your administration to reach a conclusion to the present situation which will be beneficial for all stakeholders.

*The delivery of our proposed package is contingent upon the cancellation of the planned GPB takeover of WRAS hours. Our goal, as we've stated, is the preservation of WRAS/ Album 88 as a completely student-run media outlet. The package outlined below with specific benefits for GSU students is more detailed than the ambiguous benefits described by GPB in the agreement. This will allow the administration to exercise its out clauses in the agreement. We expect by now GPB may be motivated to do the same, as a prolonged struggle to replace the WRAS/Album 88 brand is not in their interest either.*

## PROPOSAL DETAILS

### 1. INTERNSHIP PROGRAM:

The A88A Internship program offers the following value proposition:

We will include **up to one hundred (100) internship opportunities** in broadcasting and media in general. While not all internships involve TV broadcasting, as you articulated in our call, media convergence is key and students need to develop well-rounded skills in media in order to succeed in their careers.

Specific to TV broadcasting, our internship opportunities would:

- ✓ Include first-tier media companies such as Turner, Cox, WSB, and other strong local private-sector media outlets
- ✓ Provide a long list of facilities and equipment which students will be exposed to during their internships, including dozens of studios, editing suites, and portable broadcasting units
- ✓ Offer both paid and unpaid internship opportunities, averaging 20+ hours per week per internship
- ✓ Represent, on the aggregate, dozens of hours of unique local programming per week
- ✓ Provide students with access to viewership in the tens of millions per week

By comparison GPB has offered, in the agreement, an undetermined number of internship opportunities of unspecified nature, defined as “a reasonable amount of opportunity... to intern with and job shadow...” It is unclear to us at this time how many hours are involved in each opportunity; whether the opportunities are paid or unpaid; and what specific roles and responsibilities will be offered for GSU students. The internships will expose students to the work being done at GPB’s studio, which consists of 5-6 studio rooms<sup>2</sup>, and an unclear number of editing suites which we believe would be far fewer than the total our private sector partners would provide. The same goes for the total hours of internships GPB could offer or the total unique local programming hours for which GPB is responsible. Additionally, GPB local TV viewership is dwarfed by the viewership and listenership represented by our partners.

*It is important to note that this internship issue should not be mutually exclusive – that is, if GPB relinquishes the option to take over WRAS, there is no reason why GPB should not continue to support the internships they have already offered. None of the organizations listed in the A88A internship package expects to receive access to any GSU assets in exchange for the internships offered. Suitable internship opportunities have been, and will continue to be, available at GPB and many other media companies around Atlanta, without any need for GSU to trade any assets.*

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://www.gpb.org/studio-production>

## 2. MENTORSHIP PROGRAM:

The A88A Mentorship Program consists of offering students a one-on-one consultation opportunity with mentors of their choice. Many alumni are offering their time and expertise, on a regular basis, in order to advise students about their career choices: how to seek, identify, engage, and maximize professional opportunities; resume writing guidance; and how to establish and expand a professional network. Sharing our real-life experience with students will prove invaluable in helping GSU students advance their professional careers.

Participating alumni will represent various managerial and executive positions across many media companies in TV, radio, and new media.

By comparison, the GPB offer does not provide any specific mentorship program with actual alumni. The only hands-on advice that would be offered to GSU students would be the supervision of their programming work which may or may not be aired via GPB.

## 3. NETWORKING PROGRAM:

Album 88 Alumni's reach at this preliminary stage already has identified over seventy (70) professionals, of which about thirty (30) are in the media business, and a significant number are GSU Department of Communication alumni. We will grow our alumni outreach program; and identify and organize additional members. The Album 88 Alumni networking program will allow GSU students to identify job opportunities beyond their internship and mentorship experience.

We will also establish a **career development service** which will be led by an A88A committee. In addition to seminars, workshops and online coaching, the career development service will enable senior GSU students to pursue career opportunities based on their specific interests by circulating introduction materials to selected alumni which A88A will identify as uniquely relevant for each student. This opportunity to leverage alumni for job interviews in relevant companies is invaluable and goes far beyond what any conventional, commercial job placement service can provide. Having sincere recommendations from one's mentors will increase a student's chance of landing an interview with a hiring manager, especially in large companies.

By comparison, the GPB offer does not provide any alumni networking or career development program at all, let alone programs which are as specific to the needs of each student as provided by our offer.

## 4. GSU ACCESS TO TV BROADCASTING EXPERIENCES

In this section, we suggest how existing resources could be leveraged to achieve the administration's goal of developing more real world opportunities for TV broadcasting majors, specifically on the side of TV production work and syndication. We also discuss the value of access to GPB broadcasting experience as compared with the access to WRAS broadcasting experience – a point that speaks directly to the value of the proposed partnership vs. the goal of the administration. We then provide an alternative solution to the GPB goal that also achieves GSU's goal.

### Leveraging existing assets: Production

**Enhancing the use of GSTV:** GSU's existing student-run TV station, GSTV, can accommodate the sort of TV productions the GSU administration has expressed interest in seeing. This station has a couple of studios and editing suites. It is aired on campus, and thus under-utilized with respect to the broad programming vision outlined by the administration.

**Enhancing the use of DAEL:** GSU's Department of Communication students have access to DAEL (Digital Arts and Entertainment Laboratory), which has a state-of-the-art production studio, screen testing lab, media editing suite, audio recording/editing studio, production equipment checkout service, theater and production booth, and meeting areas. Just like GSTV, DAEL is under-utilized. It can easily accommodate the sort of student-created TV productions the GSU administration has expressed an interest in seeing.

### Leveraging Existing Assets: Distribution

**Enhancing GSU's exposure via "Get Local" VOD in partnership with indieATL :** GSU already has access to a TV program distribution network through Comcast's "Get Local" VOD (Video On Demand) channel, which reaches 2.3MM Comcast households in Atlanta (Comcast's VOD services are available as a part of their consumer TV packages). If utilized and marketed, for example, in cooperation with WRAS, GSU-student-produced programming on this VOD channel could reach a wide viewership that could surpass any GPB sub-channel viewership.

Taking advantage of VOD would allow for longer production schedules for GSU's Department of Communication, as the concern about filling weekly hours with content (presently required by the GPB agreement) is eliminated. It will also lead to more variety in the types of programs students produce, unsupervised and uncensored by GPB, which will result in better-quality programs overall.

Leveraging these assets does not require any additional outlets to be created, since they are already available to the university today and are simply under-utilized; and would not require a contractual commitment that is detrimental to communication majors interested in broadcast journalism, radio, and music production.



The existing facilities at GSU, coupled with access to additional facilities through A88A's internship programs, would allow students to increase their productivity while using state-of-the-art equipment. The learning opportunities will also be augmented by the experience they gain through our internship programs.

## **GSU Department of Communication Challenges**

**Producing enough programs to fill the queue:** In our discussions last week with faculty and students at the GSU Department of Communication, we learned about the significant challenges they see regarding the volume of content which must be created as required by the GPB offer, which calls for 84 hours per week of non-syndicated (as stated by Dr. Becker), unique, student-produced programming on the GPTC 0.2 sub channel.

This is not surprising, nor is it a criticism of the GSU Department of Communication. By simple comparison, local TV news operations produce about 42 hours of original, non-repetitive program content per week with staff sizes of well over 100 people—WSB-TV alone has 49 on-air reporters and anchors, including WRAS's original General Manager, Richard Belcher. Starting from zero and committing to generate 84 hours of unique, high-quality content that viewers would actually show interest in watching is no simple task, not even for a commercial organization, and definitely not for GSU students.

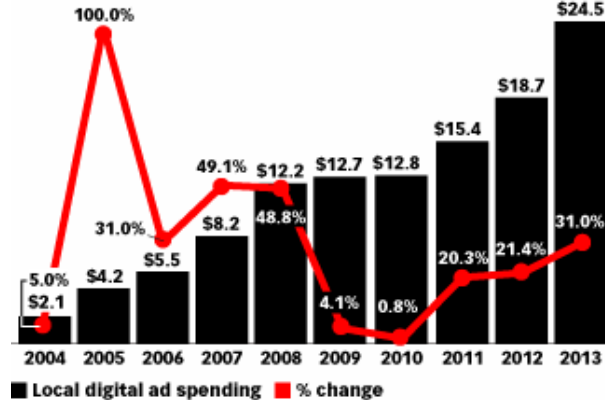
**Prioritizing distribution options:** Department of Communication students who create content have opportunities to post their work on many sites such as YouTube. **There is essentially no barrier to entry for getting distribution of video content.**

The challenge for YouTube channels is exposure – marshalling the marketing and public relations efforts that drive viewership. Here, Alum 88 Alumni can help with best practices advice – many of our members work in new media companies and can weigh in with real world experience to help students better promote their online channels.

**Is trading radio for cable TV a fair exchange for GSU students?** Radio outperforms cable when it comes to local advertisers' spending, and GPB knows this. The "exchange" of cable media hours on a secondary channel with the WRAS primary, analog radio channel is not an apples-to-apples exchange. GPB will be able to gather financial support from both sponsors and listeners/donors on WRAS in a manner that is unrivaled by the weak cable hours granted to GSU under the present agreement.

GSU's administration has stated that the agreement is not about revenue but rather a partnership that facilitates real world opportunities for its students. Clearly, working in a media outlet that carries its own weight within its respective industry would expose students to a stronger and deeper real-world experience than a media outlet that does not have comparable leverage in similar markets.

**US Local Digital Ad Spending, 2003-2013**  
billions and % change



Source: Borrell Associates, "Benchmarking: Local Radio Stations' Online Revenues" commissioned by Radio Advertising Bureau (RAB); eMarketer calculations, Feb 25, 2013

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www.eMarketer.com

**US Local Digital Ad Spending, by Media and Format, 2012**  
millions and % of total

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Newspapers	\$2.7	\$2,248.3	\$1,579.0	\$370.8	\$157.9	\$22.3
Broadcast TV	\$21.0	\$800.4	\$797.8	\$381.9	\$211.8	\$0.0
Directories	\$300.4	\$665.8	\$947.7	\$81.6	\$87.3	\$0.0
Cable/satellite	\$1.3	\$160.9	\$11.5	\$15.7	\$11.5	\$2.2
Radio	\$14.7	\$155.6	\$26.6	\$33.9	\$63.9	\$76.0
Magazines	\$0.2	\$121.9	\$247.8	\$5.9	\$18.0	\$0.2
Other print	\$0.2	\$126.7	\$14.2	\$1.9	\$21.4	\$2.2
Pure play	\$5,702.0	\$764.9	\$179.1	\$1,818.4	\$67.9	\$198.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$6,042.6</b>	<b>\$5,044.5</b>	<b>\$3,803.6</b>	<b>\$2,710.1</b>	<b>\$639.7</b>	<b>\$301.6</b>
% share	32.6%	27.2%	20.5%	14.6%	3.5%	1.6%

Source: Borrell Associates, "Benchmarking: Local Radio Stations' Online Revenues" commissioned by Radio Advertising Bureau (RAB), Feb 25, 2013

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www.eMarketer.com

The point of the above charts is simply to outline the “mindshare” and clout that each medium has within its industry. The table on the right shows that a local radio station is a much stronger asset than a local cable channel. This is true regardless of whether the entity is for-profit or non-profit.

This fact is not lost on GSU students who are the direct beneficiaries of both options – access to TV work vs. access to radio work. Building a career is not only helped by the hardware students have access to, such as the studio itself, but also by the experience students gain in their interaction with the audience and within the industry itself.

**Trading the tested and proven Album 88 brand for a speculative cable channel which is unlikely to have significant viewership is not a logical decision from a pure media ownership perspective. The end result will be a decrease in GSU’s media reach, which does not serve GSU’s Department of Communication students’ interests at all.**

**There Are Other Options:**

We invite GSU to explore all possible alternatives to an in-kind exchange—alternatives that preserve the Album 88 brand while still helping GPB to address its goal of gaining access to the Atlanta market of listeners and donors. We identified two such possible options – other options may still exist.

**Our suggested options:**

1. Recent FCC rulings allow for the use of FM translators which would allow GPB to broadcast in the Atlanta area while leaving the original frequency unchanged—both formats can be broadcast via the WRAS-FM license, at two slightly different points on the FM dial.

2. Providing GPB access only to the HD antenna is also an option. With HD radio, sub-channels can be used to provide multiple programming streams via broadcast signals.

Such solutions would create a situation very similar to what GPB is offering GSU on the cable TV side. Both solutions would prevent GPB from being forced to fight the current brand that WRAS 88.5 FM/ Album 88 has in Atlanta, creating confusion for NPR listeners who run into Album 88 programming blocks.

We ask that GSU consider these alternate options seriously, because they represent a solid opportunity for GSU to gain access to both GPB's resources and those offered by Album 88 Alumni in our proposal. Please remember: Our proposal includes a large amount of support from the local Atlanta media and from national media as well. We have awakened a large and loud community of supporters of student-controlled programming at WRAS.

We believe an FM translator represents the best technological and format-related option. With the FM translator, WRAS/Album 88 can remain a student-run radio outlet while GPB gets to broadcast its NPR-based talk format in the Atlanta market.

## SUMMARY

We see an exciting opportunity for GSU to position itself, to potential students and to the community of listeners and viewers, as a leader in new media. This is a chance to define media convergence for college communication departments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, spearheading what university media/communication departments should look like in years to come.

It is clear that WRAS/Album 88 is an invaluable brand for GSU. The exchange proposed with GPB at present is not an apples-to-apples trade, and therefore is a disservice to GSU's students, its alumni and to our community.

Our proposed program addresses two key areas of concern for Department of Communication students: First, the convergence of digital and traditional media outlets; and second, the disruptive nature of new content distribution methods. In our program, both will be integrated into the curriculum in an unprecedented manner through real-world experiences in commercial media companies. It has the potential to be a nationwide paradigm for university communication-related programs.

Our proposal addresses the administration's two goals: Increasing internship and exposure opportunities for Department of Communication / TV broadcasting majors, and increasing the access GSU has to media outlets. We provide viable alternatives that address all stakeholders' interests and enhance the GSU program overall in a significant, impactful and measurable manner.

The members of Album 88 Alumni deeply desire to work with our alma mater to enhance student opportunities. We bring our enthusiasm and passion to bear for these students. We are honored to be given this chance to pay forward the gifts that were given to us, and we add to the basket more gifts from our own hard work. Please, join with us, and let us make this proposal a reality, for the students, for Georgia State University, and its legacy.