

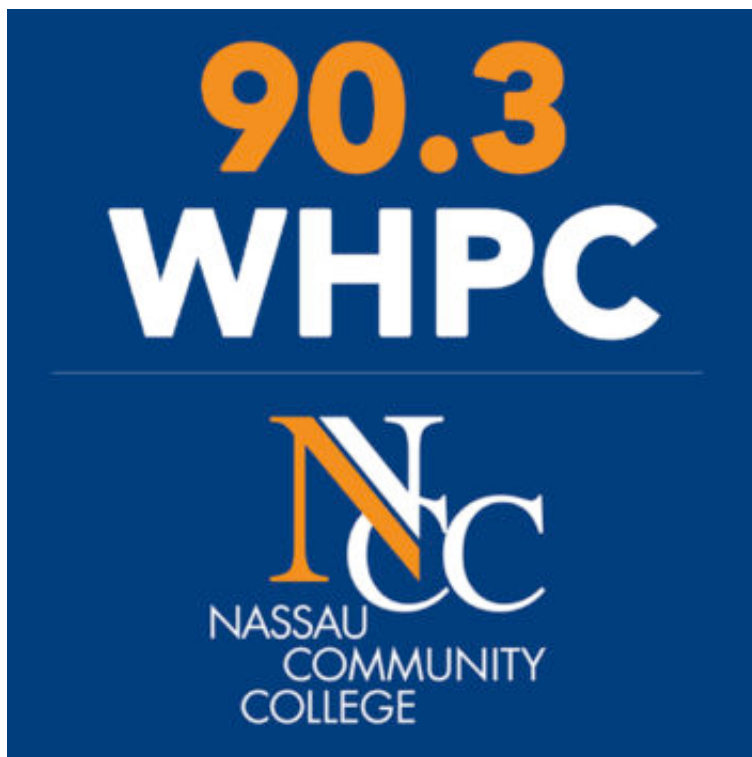


[HOME](#) > [NEWS AND BUSINESS](#) > [PROGRAMMING AND SALES](#)

Inside the “Best Community College Station”

A chat with Shawn Novatt, director of WHPC(FM) in Garden City, N.Y.

PAUL MCLANE · MAY 7, 2019



Shawn Novatt is director of WHPC(FM)

“The Voice of Nassau Community College” in New York. In 2019, it was nominated for 12 awards from the [Intercollegiate Broadcasting System](#). We asked Novatt to tell us about this community college noncommercial educational station.

Radio World: *What should we know about the station?*

Shawn Novatt: Well, the biggest news of all is that WHPC just won five IBS 2019 Awards at the 79th Annual Intercollegiate Broadcasting System Conference on March 2 in New York City.

The awards were for Best Public Affairs Program (for “Your Family’s Health”), Best On-Air Schedule (for the second year in a row), Best Celebrity/Artist Interview (Herb Alpert, interviewed by Michael Anthony), Best Morning Show (“The Nassau Morning Madhouse”) and, drum roll please ... Best Community College Radio Station in the Nation!

I could not be more proud of the work my staff, students and community volunteers have done in the past 12 months – and this industry recognition makes all of the work worth it.

This is WHPC’s 47th year on the air, and this summer marks the start of my fourth year as the station’s director. Over the past three years, we have worked very hard to create and follow a new station mission: providing professional broadcast training to qualified Nassau Community College students.

Three years ago, the station had about three students volunteering and over 60 community volunteers. In the years since, we have worked diligently to raise brand recognition in the community, including participating at new student orientations, club fairs, welcome back parties, spring BBQs and other on-campus events. As a result of these efforts, our team roster boasts about 70 students and 55 community volunteers. The peer interactions between students and the community volunteers fosters a collegial and learning community all within the radio station itself, truly enriching our students’ experiences.



WHPC's Director Shawn Novatt (blue shirt on right) is surrounded by NCC President Dr. W Hubert Keen, Dr. Janet Caruso, AVP Workforce Development and Lifelong Learning, Dr. Valerie Collins, VP Academic Affairs, and WHPC's student and volunteer personnel, celebrating its 2018 Intercollegiate Broadcasting System award wins.

Even while the station has grown, we have maintained, if not improved, the overall sound of the station. We have updated the programming by replacing most of our “oldies” programs with 40 hours weekly of “The Nassau Mix.” This particular program plays “The ’90s, 2K and Today” with the goal to play new hit songs before the “big guys” like Z100 and KTU play them.

However, we still have long-running fan-favorite programs including “American Hit Radio,” a documentary show that discusses the biggest albums of the past 50 years; “Beatlesongs,” where we play anything written or performed by The Beatles or any of their members solo, and ethnic shows like “Profumi D’Italia,” our Italian show that has been with us for 23 years.

We also have about 60 other types of programming – you can find our complete schedule at NCCradio.org; thus we appeal to a wide variety of musical tastes and interests.

RW: *How did the station come to be?*

Novatt: When the station started in 1972, Nassau Community College and Adelphi University shared the 90.3 FM frequency. When Adelphi decided to no longer offer radio at their school in 1995, Nassau Community College purchased the signal and began 24-hour programming; since then, we never looked back.

RW: *What is its licensing situation, management structure and programming philosophy?*

Novatt: The station is licensed to 90.3 FM at 500 watts from Garden City, N.Y. We are also the only college station on Long Island to broadcast in HD Radio.

I am the only full-time employee, and I have six part-time staff members who assist in the radio station operations, mostly on the nights and weekends.

The station is not student-run; however, student learning and development are our priorities. Every decision is made with student needs in mind. A live, student-produced show will always take precedence over any other program.

While final programming decisions are made by me, all personnel are able to suggest new programs. Over the past three years, we have created many new student-hosted and student-produced shows, including "Electric Air," our EDM show; "Ritmo Latino," a Hispanic mix show; and "The Rock Binge," a show that plays rock and alternative music from 2000 to today – binge on! There are many more examples, too many to mention.

We want to make sure we are preparing students for working in the radio/media industry, and that's where our morning show, "The Nassau Morning Madhouse," and "The Nassau Mix" come in. But at the same time, we want to make sure we are offering programming you simply cannot find anywhere else on the dial in Market #20 Nassau-Suffolk, N.Y. That's where shows like "Revelations," our rock-rarities show; "FM Punk," our punk-rock and heavy metal show; and ethnic shows like "The German Hit

Parade,” come in. Our programming is quite eclectic and unique, for sure.

For about seven hours each night, we are in automation. However, we do not voice-track any of our shows — they are recorded live-to-tape, affording our newer students the chance to experience being “on the air” as they record. Voice tracking is a skill that should be taught to students, and our future plans include potentially broadcasting a portion of voice tracked programming in the overnight hours so as to educate our students in emerging industry practices.



Station personnel interviewed former New York Giants player Rodney Hampton live at a local restaurant.

RW: *Is career preparation for broadcasting part of the mission? What do current students*

think about radio as a career path and why?

Novatt: I like to tell the students that, while my job description says that I direct the radio station, I believe that my true calling is to educate our students and prepare them for careers in the broadcast and media industries.

Having worked in the New York City and Long Island markets, I have cultivated many contacts who assist our students in securing positions in the broadcast industry upon graduation from NCC. Through those contacts, our students can see up close and personally, the largest and most state-of-the-art radio stations in the country, and make contacts of their own with those radio stations. In addition, it allows them to compare favorably our college radio equipment with those of commercial broadcasters.

Our mission is to provide professional broadcast training, and tuning in to our programming will prove that WHPC is not your typical college radio station; our students are expected to perform as professionals, thereby preparing them for smooth transitions to the commercial broadcasting world.

Recent graduates and current students are interning and working at stations owned by Cox Media Group, JVC Broadcasting, Connoisseur Media, iHeartMedia, Cumulus, Entercom and more. WHPC has alumni working at radio stations; we pride ourselves on being the first step in our students' career paths. As a community college station, my hope is those who participate at the station in hopes of establishing a career in the radio/media industry, take what they have learned at WHPC and apply that knowledge to their next college station and beyond.

RW: *What platform(s) is the station heard on, if any, in addition to over the air?*

Novatt: We have increased our worldwide footprint over the past three years. Besides

being [available on our school website](#), we have partnered with the iHeartRadio app, as well as the TuneIn Radio app — just search for WHPC. We are also heard on smart speakers simply by asking them to “Play WHPC.”

We know that smart speakers are now readily available in about 25% of homes in our area (and growing), so we are reminding our listeners that we are available on those devices by advertising running imaging promoting it, and reminding our jocks to mention it in their mic breaks. The best thing that could happen to our industry was the smart speaker ... now we just need to be smart about making sure people know that the speakers can do more than tell you the time and the weather, but it can bring local radio from the car back inside the home where it began. Go ahead — try it. “Alexa, play WHPC!”

[\[Read about Nassau Community College alumnus Mike Leone\]](#)

RW: *What are the biggest challenges facing most college radio stations? How has WHPC navigated them?*

Novatt: The biggest problem college stations face, especially two-year colleges like ours, is turnover. As soon as someone gets really good at their job, they graduate.

I have to constantly train new staff members in order to maintain the quantity of shows — and more importantly, the *quality* of the programming — and due to the two-year limit in most cases, I have to do it fast. The average student is ready to go on the air after six lessons/weeks of training.

But the training does not stop once a student is cleared to go on the air — we are constantly listening to air checks and finding ways to improve the programming of the station.

RW: Describe the station facilities.

Novatt: Our station includes two large studios, one for on-air use, and the other for pre-recording programs as well as training.

Over the past three years, we have added and renovated two edit rooms, equipped with computers that have the latest version of Adobe Audition on them, as well as mixers and mics so students can create liners, promos and other pre-produced materials. We subscribe to a production music and sound effects library, allowing all of our imaging to sound super professional.

The two large studios use Wheatstone digital consoles, and in the last 18 months, we upgraded our automation software to BE AudioVault Flex. We keep most of our music in the "vault" along with all imaging and other production elements, as well as pre-produced shows. Each studio still has three updated Denon CD players, and Technic turntables for our classic-based programming to use (although they are getting less used every day).

Each studio has four to five microphones, and our production room has a second "announce booth" for talk show hosts and their guests to use while the person producing the show can sit at the console without worrying about making additional noise. Finally, both studios also have access to a computer with Adobe Audition installed to be able to record shows and playback or edit additional audio if needed.





WHPC students Nick Ohrnberger and Sarah Albertson work together on a live broadcast from a local supermarket.

RW: *Who is the chief engineer or person in charge of the technical aspects of the facilities?*

Novatt: We work with Bud Williamson and Digital Radio Engineering. I also want to give a shout-out to our colleague Andy Gladding, who works at neighbor Hofstra University's radio station. Andy Gladding also works with DRE, and has been awesome to work with. Together, they have helped us grow our radio station by assisting us in upgrading our RDS software and our new Telos VoIP phone system, among other updates.

RW: *Any major initiatives we should know about?*

Novatt: We are always looking for new ways to promote the station and have introduced station swag, including pens, phone wallets, bumper stickers and more. Our staff helps brand the station by wearing coordinating radio T-shirts and sweatshirts at the many outreach events we now participate in, and even continue the

radio promotion by wearing the clothing proudly in their everyday lives.

We recently created social media accounts (90.3 WHPC on Facebook, @903whpc on Twitter and Instagram), and we have students helping to create content.

We work with local chambers of commerce to have a table and presence at major fairs and festivals across Nassau County to promote our station.

We work with amazing local radio stations like WBLI and WBAB to partner with them on major events they produce in our area. We aggressively find and take advantage of every chance to promote the station, at little to no cost.

We hope to expand our physical footprint on campus so that broadcasting opportunities increase for both our NCC students and community members, which in turn will expand the breadth of programming available to our listeners.

RW: *What else should we know?*

Novatt: We love to do remote broadcasts, and we have partnered with Lee Harris and Harris Media by utilizing their QGoLive system. This allows us to broadcast live from anywhere WIFI or a strong cell signal is available, which provides the in-studio sound. We have used this program to broadcast Nassau Lions Football and Basketball, broadcast live from local restaurants like Miller's Ale House, supermarkets like Stew Leonard's, and more. [We were actually featured in a blog post by QGoLive](#) about how awesome our live broadcast from the IBS conference this month sounded – using only an iPhone!

I regularly bring my connections in the industry to the Nassau Community College campus to hold “Meet the DJ” sessions for my students. I welcome anyone interested in joining us to contact me at Shawn.novatt@ncc.edu.

We have hosted a few virtual sessions via Skype already, and I'd love to offer more. I know how important strong connections are to landing that first job — I believe that my industry connections and contacts will assist our students to maintain an edge over other job seekers, by exposing them to the industry insiders with whom I have worked.

Finally, we would not be where we are today without our fantastic listeners. We hold fundraising marathons annually for most of our shows, and the financial support they have provided, along with a handful of underwriting sponsors, have helped the station grow in many ways. We hope the support never ends.

Radio World wants to know about your college radio operation. Email us at radioworld@futurenet.com and we may feature you in an upcoming article.

TAGS · COLLEGE RADIO · NEW YORK · SHAWN NOVATT · WHPC



RELATED



BUYER'S GUIDE

MultiTech Installs Tieline Codecs for Steadfast STLs

Variety of codecs and features builds long-term relationship