

PHOTO: The author Greg Macdougall introduces the late Anishinabe Algonquin elder and spiritual leader William Commanda in 2008 at the inaugural Organizing For Justice conference, an event co-organized by OPIRG-GRIPO at the University of Ottawa, unsurrendered Anishinabe Algonquin territory. (Credit: Romola V. Thumbadoo)

and problematic nature of our communications technologies, the devastation of our environment, and the social and economic injustices people face.

These two organizations are antidotes. They provide connection, they provide community, they provide opportunities to be involved, and they provide a way to take action on issues.

One student asked me why CHUO should be supported financially by students, even if it's only $3 per term, when other radio stations are self-sufficient. So I got into the differences between for-profit radio versus a non-profit organization that provides a benefit to the community but doesn't make money doing it. It is kind of like when the government provides services that aren't profitable, but we still collectively fund them because we understand their importance.

It's up to the U. Ottawa students to make their choice this week on the future of both OPIRG and CHUO, but the risk is that students might not fully understand the choice they're making – a choice they're making for all of us.

BYLINE: Greg Macdougall is part of the 'Restore CHUO' campaign, and has previously been a volunteer non-student member of OPIRG-Ottawa. He also previously worked for a couple of years as a uOttawa Research Assistant on an award-winning collaborative research project with The Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre.

Both OPIRG-Ottawa and CHUO lost their referendum votes. Support them before it is too late... **Restore CHUO: linktr.ee/891chuo — OPIRG: opirg-gripo.ca**

OPIRG and CHUO

Ontario Public Interest Research Group - Ottawa

Campus/Community Radio 89.1 FM

Two invaluable parts of our community in peril



CHUO 89.1 FM campus/community radio — RADIO FOR EVERYONE!

"CHUO, you bring the community and culture to campus — and the campus to the community."





"It's not only the music, it's the local people, resources, and events on and off campus... These connections can change lives!"

"I'll vote for you, CHUO.
I'll tell my friends why to support you, too!"

CHUO referendum ($3 levy), part of University of Ottawa undergraduate student UOSU elections

Student Vote: March 2nd - 6th

A zine by Equitable Education .ca

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In December (2025), the news reported that CHUO 89.1 FM, the campus/community radio station at University of Ottawa, was closing. But, now some six months later, on the 35th anniversary of it first broadcasting on FM, it is still broadcasting. So what is happening?

Here is a very short summary, as of early June 2026:

The first primary part of the story is that in 2023-2024 the station lost a student referendum on continuing the student fee that financially supported the station.

This had constituted approx 80% of the station's annual revenues. However, there wasn't anything come up with to replace that gap, nor to adequately reduce expenses, so by late 2025 the station was running out of $$.

Then the uOttawa administration all of a sudden said they would start charging rent for the studio/office space, which the station didn't have $$ for.

At that point, the five people on the Board of Directors decided to halt the community fundraising campaign that was only about half-way through, and to announce the closure of the station. It was a big surprise to many, and it was a decision taken without any formal consultation of the station's contributors or the broader community.

One of the two volunteer show hosts on the Board decided to resign shortly after that.

The two station staff as well as the one uOttawa student on the Board, had put together a student referendum question in December to attempt to reinstate a student fee to re-start funding CHUO.

But they hadn't really put together any type of campaign plan to convince students, so in February when the election period was about to start, I pulled together a small group of people, mostly station volunteers, to run a campaign for the referendum. The vote was in early March. It did better than the initial referendums 2023-2024 but still wasn't successful.

Then our group helped organize a petition to remove/replace some or all of the Board, so that we could have a Board that would attempt to save the station. This was by the process in the station's bylaws to call a General Meeting, where the station membership can have a vote. However, it is now over 2 months later without having the meeting - which according to the bylaws, is to be carried out "forthwith" after receipt of the petition.

Another Board member, the uOttawa admin representative, has since resigned, leaving the Board with only three members and thus without quorum. The bylaws say in that circumstance, a meeting needs to be called for the membership to vote in new Board members to fill the vacancies.

So there are two meetings needing to happen, which could probably be combined into one since they have some overlapping purpose. The Board can't legitimately make any decisions at this point, without quorum, but to keep the station going and to get it going in a direction that will be good in the long-term requires some good decisions.

Before we organized the petition, there was also the idea of doing some urgent fundraising - because there are some key expenses needing to be paid in the short term, simply to keep the basic infrastructure intact that the station needs to broadcast. Let alone finding another studio, or being able to pay anyone to do the necessary things to run a successful station(*).

Future of PIRG and Campus/Community Radio in Peril at uOttawa

[OP-ED]

Sometimes, with all the bad news we're constantly hearing about, we need to hear about good things. When those good things are at risk, that's when we really need to hear about them.

This week at the University of Ottawa, the futures of two institutions are at stake: the radio station, CHUO 89.1 FM, and the 'Ontario Public Interest Research Group,' also known as OPIRG-Ottawa or by the French acronym GRIPO.

As part of the annual student general elections, there are separate referendum questions on re-establishing a student levy for each, to ensure they are funded enough to continue operations. They both lost their student levy two years ago, and just this past December the CHUO board of directors decided the station would need to shut down due to financial unsustainability. OPIRG-GRIPO isn't at that point yet but could be soon.

So the question of course is, why should students support them?

But there's also the question, why is this of concern to people who aren't students?

I think I'm in a good position to speak to that second question. For over a decade I was involved in different initiatives with OPIRG-Ottawa, on a volunteer basis. And I've been listening to CHUO for over three decades; in more recent years I was also on-air as guest on a few shows, and contributed in other ways to some others.

But I can also speak personally about the value these organizations offer to students.

When I was a student, I took Mathematics at U.Waterloo in a joint program with Education at Queen's U. It was only in my fifth year that I learned of WPIRG, UW's equivalent of OPIRG. They are a centre of activism on campus.

I'd been on the track and field team, and then with the student newspaper, but it was through involvement with WPIRG – including their show on the UW campus/community radio CKMS – that I started to learn about and connect with initiatives and people off-campus, in the community. Up until then, I was very much living a student-centred life.

This is what I want to stress. Both the PIRG and the campus/community radio are 'infrastructures' with only a few paid staff, that support the many volunteers who come in and make the organizations what they are. These volunteers consist both of students and of members of the greater community.

Both OPIRG and CHUO connect the campus with the community and vice versa.

They offer such a diverse range of benefits that it's not feasible to really describe them all here.

But they offer a home for a variety of voices and of values that aren't supported in the same way anywhere else.

These are things that are so important in our current society.

Mental health in youth is said to be in crisis – mental health in many people is in crisis – and some of the key elements are loneliness and isolation, the impersonal

CKMS had lost their student funding. WPIRG is now defunct, but CKMS has been re-born as a station that isn't dependent on student funding.

The Wikileaks had exposed the organized effort by more senior conservatives to mobilize students to use a range of unethical but effective tactics to get rid of non-conservative institutions on campus.

When I wrote about the campaign to defund the PIRG at Carleton University in 2013, I emphasized how PIRGs are an instance of what are described as "infrastructures of dissent" or "infrastructures of resistance." I think these are important concepts to understand: things that foster and sustain a community, culture, and continuity of activism and solidarity over the long term. That is what the conservatives want to remove, and that is what we want to defend and build.

The last part of my long-winded intro to this op-ed, is about where I submitted this op-ed to: the Ottawa Citizen newspaper.

What I'll note about it, is that in summer 2024 I sent in a letter to the editor, which did get published*.

It was about the CANSEC, Canada's largest weapons manufacturer conference that takes place annually in Ottawa, and the protests against CANSEC that year – that year being 2024, in the midst of the ongoing Gaza genocide.

I said they published my letter, but they did a bit of butchering of it and ended up needing to publish a correction two days later.

What they did to it, tells its own story of the way the corporate media works sometimes.

A sentence that I had written was, "The International Court of Justice issued orders to Israel to prevent the commission of genocide in Gaza, but Israel continues to violate these orders, and the International Criminal Court has been asked by its chief prosecutor to issue warrants against leaders of both Hamas and Israel."

They removed the part about Israel violating the orders, so it went to print saying, " The International Court of Justice issued orders to Israel to prevent the commission of genocide in Gaza, and the court has been asked by its chief prosecutor to issue warrants against leaders of both Hamas and Israel."

The correction they needed to make, of course, was because they had unwittingly conflated the two courts into one as part of their process of removing what they didn't want to have published. They don't issue corrections or apologies simply for taking out part of what you write.

I was hoping they'd publish this current piece about the situation at uOttawa. I wrote it with the general readership in mind, in a way that hopefully could be understood well.

In our campaign, a major difficulty has been the issue of how to reach students effectively, because many of them have no idea the elections are even happening, nor do they know there is a campus radio station. One way we've figured out, is that if we reach people who know students and can relay the message, that can be quite helpful in it's own right. It's not everything, but it's a part.

Here is the op-ed... with accompanying photo:

But our decision was that we couldn't do fundraising if the money was at risk of being mismanaged, or the community having that perception.

What is going on now, for anyone who understands it, can only further that perception of mismanagement and distrust.

The lack of transparency, the lack of communication, the lack of legitimate decision-making processes, is troubling - and will be very costly if it destroys the station's future before other people have the opportunity to 'right the ship' as it were.

**Note: Without a studio, the station has continued a non-live broadcast; some shows are being recorded weekly and sent in for broadcast, while other shows are repeats from before the closure in December. This broadcasting is all being taken care of on an unpaid basis by the laid-off station manager. In the decision announced December to close the station, this broadcasting was slated to end in March, but it has continued since then without plans to stop.*

Official text — City of Ottawa Proclamation

CHUO 89.1 FM DAY

May 31st, 2016

WHEREAS, CHUO 89.1 FM is a touchstone for most of Ottawa's marginalized communities as well as for the arts and culture scene, providing an accessible media hub, high calibre and relevant local programming; and

WHEREAS, CHUO 89.1 FM is Canada's first bilingually licensed independent radio station; and

WHEREAS, CHUO 89.1 FM provides a community access media hub for thousands of volunteer contributors, providing training in all aspects of broadcasting, a safe space for alternative views to be aired and an amazing launching pad for so many of our emerging artists; and

WHEREAS, on this day, CHUO 89.1 FM is congratulated for 25 years of broadcasting on the FM dial and for its ongoing dedication and community support;

THEREFORE, I, Jim Watson, Mayor of the City of Ottawa, do hereby proclaim May 31st, 2016 CHUO 89.1 FM Day in Ottawa.

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Jim Watson Mayor/Maire

City of Ottawa, 110 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, ON K1P 1J1

The follwing wa published early March, prior to the referendum vote:

Two important campus organizations in Ottawa are in the final days of a student vote to determine their future. They each separately have a referendum question on the elections ballot on whether they can re-establish student funding and financial sustainability of their operations.

As part of one of the campaigns, I wrote an op-ed for the local newspaper. They haven't decided to publish it, so while there is still time in the campaign, it's worthwhile to share here (below).

Even if you aren't at the University of Ottawa, it's not irrelevant if you are concerned about the larger struggle and our collective connections. And the micro is the macro in a holographic universe. But also, maybe some readers will actually have some connections to reach UO students, and getting the word to them would be a big bonus.

Before you get to the op-ed, there are a 'few' preliminary notes with which I'd like to introduce it.

The culture of campus/community radio was important to me even before I had any direct involvements with any stations. In Ottawa, in the early/mid '90s when I started listening, CHUO as well as the station at CarletonU, CKCU 93.1 FM, were broadcasting music – especially hip-hop – you couldn't hear anywhere else. It is also more than just the music, it is the whole set of counter-cultures or alternative cultures that are provided homes on campus/community radios.

My first semi-direct involvement with CHUO was in 2001. Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, the G20/IMF/World Bank meetings were hastily rescheduled to November 16-18 in Ottawa. There was a huge chill on social movements and on protest in that time, and the Ottawa protests were the first such summit to happen after the attacks. The protests were very damped down in comparison to April of that year in Quebec City against the summit there for the FTAA (the Free Trade Area of the Americas), but there were still protests .

I was part of the Ontario Indymedia (IMC: Independent Media Centre) network, and CHUO provided a two hour block of their broadcasting on the Sunday morning, the 18th, for our protest coverage. I said I was 'semi-direct' involved because I wasn't on the radio, but instead was doing our print coverage production, the 'Blind Spot' and 'Raw News' papers. We published them as short PDFs in 8.5×11 format. You can find the recording of that two-hour broadcast, plus the set of PDFs, included in this archive I've started of some CHUO-related content. It's important that we do what we can to make our history accessible.

Secondly, along with the radio, CHUO, there is the PIRG: OPIRG-GRIPO or OPIRG-Ottawa.

PIRG stands for Public Interest Research Group. In Canada, I think they are all campus-based organizations, and in this province, they are all under one umbrella name, 'Ontario Public Interest Resarch Group', but they are all independent organizations.

Between 2007-2018 or so, I was involved as a non-student in a few initiatives connected with OPIRG-Ottawa. The longest-lasting was our 'action group' IPSMO, the Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement Ottawa.

Our central and founding cause was organizing in solidarity with the Algonquins of Barriere Lake (Mitchikanibikok Inik), located about 3.5 hours north of Ottawa in so-called Quebec, and one of eleven Anishinabeg Algonquin First Nations that make up the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation. But we also did a lot of other work and collaborations over the decade or so we were active – our being situated in the country's capital was a large factor in some of what we were involved in doing.

As I already mentioned, it is good if we can document our history and make it accessible for others. There isn't a comprehensive resource I can link to for all of what IPSMO did – there is our website, which is still up on WordPress, and our Youtube channel, and these are at least something of a historical record.

I bring that up because the following isn't particularly representative overall of our work in any way, but it is something very noteworthy and it is documented well, thanks to one of our members, the late Matt Cicero aka Matt Morgan-Brown.

What it is, is that we had an undercover police officer infiltrate IPSMO for almost a year in advance of the 2010 G20 summit/protests in Toronto. If you're involved in activism, it's probably not going to be surprising to hear that this kind of thing happens. But it is surprising when it happens to you.

The 'you' I refer to was a group of people of varying backgrounds and also varying levels of political experience and radicalness. We were quite an open group, in terms of membership – which kind of explains how a police got involved, albeit under false pretences, but it also is to say that our membership was open to people who were new to activism. We'd do events on campus, including during frosh week, such as 'Intro to Indigenous Solidarity' workshops. Then on the other extreme, a few of our members got arrested in highway blockades, locked down with concrete barrels and then removed with severe "pain compliance" methods by the 'SQs' (the Sûreté du Quebec provincial police force).

So that is the context of the collective surprise of discovering one of our members was actually a cop. You can read more of a description here in Briarpatch magazine, and then as a more formal political analysis in Upping The Anti journal.

That ends this introduction to the two organizations whose future is at stake.

I also want to note that in the op-ed, I mention WPIRG and the campus radio at University of Waterloo, CKMS. That's essentially where I started into activism, and what I want to note here is the later story of covert campus infiltration by conservatives.

In 2009 there was a Wikileaks release (described in context here) where two conservative operatives came in and gave sessions at various universities for student campus conservative associations about how to do campaigns to defund PIRGs and other campus institutions. The two operatives were former UW students themselves, including one of whom [Aaron Lee Wudrick] had been a columnist at the student newspaper at the same time I was – and obviously thus the two of us had had some public animosity between us.

[*Note: the above and two below paragraphs have been slightly edited for accuracy re: where the workshops were hosted. **Added note: as described by Press Progress, in 2024 Wudrick became Director of Policy for the federal Conservative Party, after having headed domestic policy for the McDonald-Laurier Institute (a neo-right-wing think-tank) since 2021 and before that, leading the 'Canadian Taxpayers Federation' (a very influential 'federation' that has fewer members than most people have fingers). He was also columnist at the Ottawa Citizen for a while.]

Fast forward a decade or so after that infamous workshops, and both WPIRG and