

**CAMPUS NEWSPAPERS:
MAKING THE CASE
FOR A CODE OF ETHICS**

by

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The campus press is struggling to understand the full range and complexity of newsroom issues. Evidence suggests that campus newspapers often print material that many deem too controversial, insensitive, or libelous. Although the professional media encounter ethical problems, special circumstances make ethical reasoning even more challenging in campus newsrooms. Student journalists work in the campus environment, where they wrestle with heightened political and social awareness, administrative control, and inherent conflicts that arise from covering an institution of which they are also a part. In addition, they generally lack the professional experience, sensitivity to race and gender issues, and an awareness of the impact of the mass media that are crucial to making news decisions. This thesis will discuss these problems in detail and propose an ethical approach to dealing with them. The intent is to provide a basis for discussion about ethical reasoning and to establish written codes of ethics in campus newsrooms.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

College journalists make some tough ethical decisions. What should they do with advertisements that promote Holocaust revisionism? Do they name the student charged with rape? How far should they push in investigating rumors of misconduct by a professor? How do they deal with pressure from the administration?

Like the professional press, the campus press is struggling to understand the full range and complexity of newsroom issues. Evidence suggests that campus newspapers often print material that many deem too controversial, insensitive, or libelous. Recent headlines have called attention to columns and cartoons that offend minorities and women, pranks and parodies that alarm the administration, and advertisements that promote drinking and tobacco use. These and other ethical improprieties have affected readership, advertising and, in some cases, future editorial decision-making.

Some of this backlash is the result of widespread criticism of the mass media. It is no secret that most people believe journalists in general are less than ethical. They have heard about writers plagiarizing their peers, watched camera crews jockeying for shots of grief-stricken families, and read about reporters prying into political sex scandals. As Louis Day writes, "The polls continue to show an erosion of credibility and confidence in the mass media, some of which is no doubt due to the public's perception that the media ship is sailing without a moral compass."¹

Although the professional media encounter their fair share of problems, special circumstances make ethical reasoning even more challenging in campus newsrooms. Student journalists work in the campus environment, where they wrestle with heightened political and social awareness, administrative control, and inherent conflicts that arise from covering an institution of which they are also a part. In addition, they generally lack the professional experience, sensitivity to race and gender issues, and an awareness of the impact of the mass media that are crucial to making sound news decisions.²

Student journalists could use more guidance, but the tendency among professionals is to ignore their cries for help. While books, articles, studies, seminars, and workshops on ethics in professional newsrooms are numerous, few media practitioners or scholars seem to care about the campus press. Even fewer have approached student journalists with the understanding that they face ethical problems different from those found in professional newsrooms. An editorial in *Editor & Publisher* commented on this reluctance to examine the campus press:

A smattering of professional journalists have written to us over the past year to inquire why we are devoting more space to the coverage of campus journalism. They're only young students, for gosh sakes, and we ought to be devoting our space to things more pertinent to the paid professionals, they say.³

How college newspapers make ethical decisions should not only be of concern to faculty, students, and staff, but also to society at large. The campus press reaches an estimated 13 million students, including four-year institutions and community colleges.⁴ It influences the men and women who will someday go on to positions of responsibility and leadership in society. And it teaches the next generation of journalists about the importance of fairness, accuracy, and truth in reporting.⁵

My thesis is an attempt to provide some guidance for student journalists. The primary goals were: (1) identify the ethical problems unique to campus newsrooms; (2) propose a decision-making approach that emphasizes them; and (3) argue for a written codes of ethic that could help prevent future problems. The situations described are those which confront the college press and are drawn from personal experience, interviews with student journalists, and published reports.

My thesis excludes a broad range of ethical concerns, such as deceptive reporting techniques, anonymous sources, and biased coverage, that are common in both professional and campus newsrooms. Although these issues merit consideration, they present the same fundamental concerns and require similar ethical reasoning for both student journalists and professional journalists. Moreover, there is a vast amount of written material that discusses these issues and provides guidance. Rather, my thesis focuses on the ethical problems that are unique to campus newsrooms and that have not been adequately addressed in the existing body of literature.

Finally, I recognize that there are no easy solutions or safe blueprints for publishing and operating a college newspaper. Whether you agree or disagree with my judgment, I believe the information gathered will at least stimulate discussion among college journalists. My hope is that it will encourage college journalists to set high standards as they pursue a rewarding and challenging profession.

Notes

¹ Louis A. Day, *Ethics in Media Communications: Cases and Controversies*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1997) xiii.

² Monica Hill and Bonnie Thrasher, "A Model of Respect: Beyond Political Correctness in the Campus Newsroom," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 9.1 (1994): 44.

³ "Why We Cover Campuses," editorial, *Editor & Publisher*, 3 Sept. 1994: 6.

⁴ American College Media Directory. Internet. <<http://www.amercollegemedia.com>> 16 Apr. 1999.

⁵ Walter Wilcox, "The Philosophy and the Function of the College Newspaper," *Freedom and Censorship of the College Press*, ed. Herman A. Estrin and Arthur M. Sanderson. (Dubuque, IA: W.C. Brown, 1966) 1.

CHAPTER II

CODES OF ETHICS

A student at Monmouth College in New Jersey returned to his dorm room one night to find a swastika and several anti-Semitic slurs scrawled on his memo board and a pile of pennies outside his door. When a freshman journalist got wind of the story, he convinced the editor of the campus paper to publish it along with a photo across the top of page one. A few days later *The Outlook* had to run a correction. Although the student had provided a credible account of the incident, the photo turned out to be a fake. It was recreated by the reporter based on information from the alleged victim. The reporter admitted staging the shot but said he did not realize at the time that his actions were wrong. After all, he argued, the picture was an accurate portrayal that raised awareness of hate crime on campus.¹

Embarrassing episodes such as this one indicate that campus journalists need more guidance in making ethical decisions. Students generally have little or no experience working in the media. This often leads to lapses in judgment — be it mistaking the identity of a source or faking a photo — and serious repercussions for the campus press. Often the college newspaper is the first place where student journalists learn about accepted media practices and develop professional ethics. However, few college newspapers have developed consistent and effective tools for teaching ethical behavior to their staff members. For the most part ethics are still based on an honor system in college newsrooms.²

Growth of Codes

One way professional news organizations have sought to improve ethical standards is through formal codes. Most codes support the importance of the mass media in a democratic society and articulate the standards and practices that journalists should strive to attain.³ Codes emphasize accuracy, unbiased reporting, separating news from opinion, and concern for public interest.⁴ They also address such basic issues as journalists accepting free gifts, quoting confidential sources, and conflicts of interest.⁵

The belief that journalists should be bound by a uniform code of ethics has been around for decades. Codes can be traced back to 1910, when a state press agency in Kansas adopted one.⁶ In the 1920s, some newspapers and at least a dozen state press associations adopted codes because of concerns over sensationalism and the loss of credibility.⁷ However, it was not until the 1970s that codes became prevalent in all mass media fields from public relations and advertising to technical writing and business communication.⁸

Today, the majority of professional news associations and organizations have written codes of ethics.⁹ The American Society of Newspaper Editors, the National Press Photographers Association and the Radio-Television News Directors Association have developed their own codes. These codes and those of other media organizations present an array of ethical standards. One of the more well-known ethics codes was adopted by the Society of Professional Journalists. The following is an excerpt:

The Society of Professional Journalists believes the duty of journalists is to serve the truth.

We believe the agencies of mass communication are carriers of public discussion and information, acting on their Constitutional mandate and freedom to learn and report the facts.

We believe in public enlightenment as the forerunner of justice, and in our Constitutional role to seek the truth as part of the public's right to know the truth.

We believe those responsibilities carry obligations that require journalists to perform with intelligence, objectivity, accuracy, and fairness.¹⁰

Professional newspapers also have adopted or proposed ethics codes. News organizations originally copied the national codes, but now most of them write their own codes and revise them as they encounter new problems and ethical concerns. An excerpt from the *Washington Post* code of ethics:

The *Washington Post* is pledged to an aggressive, responsible and fair pursuit of the truth without fear of any special interest, and with favor to none.

Washington Post reporters and editors are pledged to approach every assignment with the fairness of open minds and without prior judgment. The search for opposing views must be routine. Comment from persons accused or challenged in stories must be included. The motives of those who press their views upon us must routinely be examined and it must be recognized that these motives can be noble and ignoble, obvious and ulterior.¹¹

Codes Are Controversial

Although codes are prevalent among news organizations, there remains considerable debate about their value, or lack thereof, in practice. Critics as well as supporters have extensively analyzed and argued the role of formal codes in professional newsrooms. "For some people, formal codes are a necessary mark of a true profession," wrote Richard Johannesen. "For others, codes are worthless exercises in vagueness, irrelevance, and slick public relations."¹²

Not all journalists are happy with the development of codes. Some charge that codes are filled with meaningless language that is too abstract and ambiguous to be applied. Others believe that formal codes restrict the constitutional rights to freedom of

speech and the free press. Still others argue that the widespread existence of codes in the mass media has not improved ethical standards because they lack effective enforcement procedures to punish violators.¹³

Many journalists believe specific and strong codes could lessen or remove most of these objections. Codes can establish ethical norms as well as keep attention focused on appropriate behavior. Also, they can act as the standard against which the industry and individual practitioners evaluate their performance.¹⁴ Finally, they can ensure that standards are set within the news organization rather than through the legislature or legal system. As David Gordon writes, “Codes serve as a starting point — a threshold if you will — for considering which principles deserve to be honored by ethical practitioners in the mass media.”¹⁵

Codes in Campus Newsrooms

No critical attention has been devoted to formal codes in campus newsrooms, despite their potential as a tool for ethical decision-making. Indeed, most books on the campus press have been concerned with legal issues — student freedom and censorship — rather than ethical ones. The few articles that have debated ethical standards in campus newsrooms never discussed the role of formal codes. And no study has examined the prevalence of ethics codes among the campus press.

A survey of student editors at both public and private institutions reveals that codes are rarely found in college newsrooms. Only five of the twenty-two campus newspapers that responded to the survey had a written code of ethics: *The Daily*, Northwestern University; *The Daily Mississippian*, University of Mississippi; *The Daily*

Wildcat, University of Arizona; *The Montana Kaimin*, University of Montana; and the *Oregon Daily Emerald*, University of Oregon.

The other newspapers took a more informal approach to codes. Two newspapers had adopted codes from other news organizations or associations: *The Red & Black*, University of Georgia, combined principles from the *Washington Post* and the Society of Professional Journalists codes; and *The Branding Iron*, University of Wyoming, adopted the Society of Professional Journalists code. Four newspapers had short “tip sheets” or “a page” in their reporters’ handbook that touched on ethical issues. One student editor said the newspaper was planning to write a code by the end of the term, and another was “not sure” if the newspaper had one.

Editors at newspapers with codes said they primarily addressed basic issues such as forbidding reporters to accept gifts from sources or moonlight for other publications. Only one editor said he was satisfied with the newspaper’s code; the rest said there were areas that could be improved. The majority of editors at newspapers without codes believed their publications would benefit from them. Moreover, the few that criticized codes were concerned that they would not provide a comprehensive enough guide to ethical decision-making as opposed to concerns that codes would be too restrictive.

The Case for Codes

Although professional journalists continue to debate the value of codes, there are different reasons campus journalists should consider them a useful tool for ethical decision-making. Compared to professional newsrooms, students produce the campus newspaper with little or no editorial guidance. Although some college publications have

advisers, many student editors end up making ethical decisions on their own. “We almost never consult outside help,” wrote Mike Greenwald, the editor of *The Cavalier Daily* at the University of Virginia. “We do have an attorney on retainer for issues relating to libel. But we do not have a faculty advisor or any other university official that helps us make tough decisions.”¹⁶

Professional news organizations can rely on experienced staff members to help novice ones learn the ropes, but this is not the case in college newsrooms. High staff turnover often prevents campus publications from building a solid base of knowledge and experience. Student journalists burn out after too many late nights in the newsroom, the pressure of the weekend paper, and the constant hustle. Even more problematic are campus publications that limit staff tenure in an effort to give as many students as possible a chance to work in the newsroom. Despite good intentions, this leaves many student journalists to learn ethical reasoning through a process of trial and error. “Writers often face ethical conflicts and as editors are changed each year, there is no set way to handle such problems,” wrote Natasha Gregoire, editor of *The Daily Mississippian* at the University of Mississippi.¹⁷

Unlike members of the professional press, campus journalists are not all reporters by nature. Students who work for college publications often are specializing in related fields — such as public relations or advertising — that abide by different practices than those commonly accepted in newsrooms. For example, public relations practitioners can write quotes and attribute them to corporate executives as long as they meet with their approval. This practice is anathema to a reporter and would never be tolerated in a

newsroom. Student journalists, however, can easily become confused when professional standards vary between mass media fields.

Codes can take some of the guesswork out of campus newsrooms. Most college publications would benefit from practical guidelines that acquaint novice reporters and editors with the basic ethical issues they will face in the news business. Of course, codes cannot guarantee that student journalists will never encounter gray or murky ethical areas. However, student journalists can agree that there are some accepted ethical standards that are common to most professional newsrooms. As Johannesen wrote: “Codes can educate new persons in a profession or business by acquainting them with guidelines for ethical responsibility based on the experience of predecessors and by sensitizing them to ethical problems specific to their field.”¹⁸

The process of developing formal codes can be a positive one that encourages novice journalists to reflect on their goals, on the means allowable to achieve those goals, and on their obligations to readers and to the newspaper.¹⁹ The campus newspaper should consider the development of codes as a learning process that is consistent with the mission of higher education. “There is no method of enforcing the code — but its very existence as a sort of contract, on the basis of which a franchise is given to publish in freedom, will be a constant reminder and frame of reference for the students,” wrote Ben Lieberman. “Indeed, the mere exercise of conferring and writing such a code will have its educational value.”²⁰

Codes in campus newsrooms can serve many of the same functions as those drafted by professional journalists. Student journalists can look to “model” codes of

ethics, such as the Society of Professional Journalists code, as a starting point for drafting their own. However, they should be careful not to adopt these codes without implementing changes. Although model codes advocate sound practices and responsible journalism, they usually lack the practicality, detail, and comprehensiveness necessary for operating student publications.²¹ Most important, they do not address the special ethical problems that student journalists encounter.

This thesis will discuss these problems in detail and propose an ethical approach to dealing with them. Each chapter will include a section on “Suggestions for Codes” that student journalists should consider when writing or updating their newspaper’s code of ethics. The intent is to provide a basis for discussion about ethical reasoning and to establish codes in campus newsrooms.

Notes

¹ John Morano, "Mistake by a Student Reporter Is Magnified," *Editor and Publisher* 30 Apr. 1994, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

² Wayne Overbeck and Thomas M. Pasqua, Jr., *Excellence in College Journalism* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1983) 263.

³ A. David Gordon, John M. Kittross, and Carol Reuss, *Controversies in Media Ethics*, overview and commentary by John C. Merrill (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1996) 66.

⁴ Gordon, Kittross, and Reuss 66.

⁵ Overbeck and Pasqua 264.

⁶ Gordon, Kittross, and Reuss 63.

⁷ Gordon, Kittross, and Reuss 63-64.

⁸ Gene Goodwin and Ron F. Smith, *Groping for Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Ames: Iowa State Press, 1994) 36.

⁹ Goodwin and Smith 36.

¹⁰ Goodwin and Smith 42.

¹¹ Bruce M. Swain, *Reporters' Ethics*, 1st ed. (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1978) 131.

¹² Richard L. Johannesen, "What Should We Teach About Formal Codes of Ethics?" *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 3.1 (1987-88): 59.

¹³ Johannesen 60.

¹⁴ Gordon, Kittross, and Reuss 69.

¹⁵ Gordon, Kittross, and Reuss 69.

¹⁶ Mike Greenwald, e-mail to the author, 24 Feb. 1999.

¹⁷ Natasha Gregoire, e-mail to the author, 16 Mar. 1999.

¹⁸ Johannesen 61.

¹⁹ Johannesen 61.

²⁰ J. Ben Lieberman, "Should the School Press Be Free?" *Freedom and Censorship of the College Press*, ed. Herman A. Estrin and Arthur M. Sanderson (Dubuque, IA: W.C. Brown, 1966) 137.

²¹ Johannesen 61.

CHAPTER III

ETHICS AND FREEDOM

In November 1997, student editors of *The Broadside*, the campus newspaper at George Mason University in Virginia, ran an editorial criticizing the governor and the school's board of visitors. The unsigned editorial derided Gov.-elect James S. Gilmore III and lamented "the dawning of the dark ages at GMU — another Republican governor was elected to office." It accused Gilmore of packing the board with his political allies and turning it into a "Republican circus." It went on to say that the campus was "so conservative that the only thing missing is a Confederate flag," and hinted that the board was intolerant of "gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender students."¹

Angered by the inflammatory comments, board members argued that the editorial could lead to a defamation suit against the paper and the university. In response, the editors accused the board of persuading student government to introduce a resolution criticizing the newspaper and recommending that its share of activities fees be taken away.² Although the editors admitted that their actions fell short of professional and ethical standards, they defended their editorial on First Amendment grounds. "We have the right to publish what we want, even if we're a student publication," said Carrie Secondo, the newspaper's editor in chief.³

Debates concerning censorship of the campus press are nothing new. Student journalists face pressure from a variety of sources that try to control publications to avoid controversy or articles that put them in a bad light. In the 1960s, tension between college

publications and their host institutions reached a climax as student journalists agitated for social and political change. On many campuses, student journalists ran into difficulties because of the outspoken positions they took against the Vietnam War and racial discrimination.⁴ In other cases, the use of four-letter words and other controversial language and visual images became the principal concern of the faculty and administration.⁵

Campus newspapers also drew fire from the administration by pointing out the injustices and indignities on their own campuses during a time when school officials still wielded considerable power over students.⁶ In fact, college students had few legal rights of any kind. School officials adhered to a concept called *in loco parentis*, which translated from Latin means “in the place of the parents.”⁷ According to the law, school officials were acting substitute parents charged with the task of looking after college students. Administrators relied on this principle to restrain and censor campus publications.

As a consequence, student journalists turned to the courts in an effort to win the constitutional rights that the professional press took for granted. By the early 1970s, students at public colleges and universities had won some major victories in the free press battle. In the landmark *Papish* case, the U.S. Supreme Court favored student publishing efforts at state colleges.⁸ Other courts also ruled that the campus press was protected under the First Amendment.⁹

Today, college publications operate with considerable freedom and autonomy compared to their predecessors in the 1960s. Censorship is not the standard procedure

practiced on most colleges and universities — public or private. Many colleges and universities value the free press and the forum it provides for enlightened debate. In fact, a 1993 survey found that about two-thirds of student publications at state colleges and more than half at private colleges operated in an atmosphere of freedom where the student staff was able to publish without prior review, censorship, or punishment.¹⁰

Although the “dark ages of American campus journalism” have come and gone, students are still quick to react to perceived threats to press freedom. Rather than offering sound reasons for publishing, they often defend themselves by claiming that they have the right to print the information regardless of the consequences. Most student journalists continue to view censorship as a legal issue while ignoring its ethical dimensions. They tend to focus on what the law *allows* them to print as opposed to what ethical reasoning *obligates* them to print.

Freedom for the campus press has been a long and arduous process, one that has taken steps forward as well as backward during the past four decades. Student journalists often fail to understand that press privileges were granted with the belief that college publications would uphold journalistic ideals in the absence of legal mandates. Indeed, they have come to the conclusion that the campus press is entitled to First Amendment protections, even though the courts have never fully resolved the issue.

Absent from this approach is a sense of responsibility and accountability on the part of the campus press. In some cases, freedom for the campus press has become an excuse for irresponsible and unethical conduct. This has tarnished the reputation of some college publications and led to attempts to reign in student journalists. School officials

have become frightened or dismayed by the content of campus newspapers and have decided to censor. Student officers have disagreed with editors and have tried to pull funding. Even the courts have reconsidered and, in some cases, reversed some of their stronger rulings from the Vietnam-protest era.

Ethical decision-making can alleviate many of the concerns about news judgment that result in censorship. Rather than defending their actions, student journalists need to develop a sound ethical approach to dealing with controversial material. By making decisions out of respect for the issues and the people involved, the campus press can shield against outside interference and control.

Legal Mandates

In the past, state and federal courts have upheld First Amendment protections for students at public colleges and universities. School officials have been able to censor publications only when they can demonstrate that some significant and imminent physical disruption of the campus will result from publishing the material. Censorship of college publications has not been allowed even when the material was considered obscene, offensive, or of poor quality. Courts also have prevented administrators from suspending student editors, withdrawing funding or censoring because of content.¹¹

However, there are signs that the courts are becoming less sympathetic toward the campus press. Last year, a student journalist sued Kentucky State University on First Amendment grounds after school officials tried to stop the campus newspaper from publishing editorials and comic strips critical of them. In *Kincaid v. Gibson*, a federal court ruled in favor of the university. The judge determined that the student did not have

the standing to sue because the articles were published and the school administrators had not required the contents of the paper to be submitted to them for prior approval.¹² While the case is currently on appeal, it should serve as a wake-up call to the campus press.

In addition, the courts have never extended First Amendment protections to private institutions. Although some critics contend that all schools are to a greater or lesser degree “public” institutions, private schools are not considered extensions of the state and their officials are not arms of the state.¹³ Since the First Amendment prevents only the government and its agents from denying free speech rights, First Amendment guarantees do not apply to private colleges and universities.¹⁴

A discussion of the legal aspects surrounding the campus press would require more space than can be devoted to here. Rather, the point is to show that student journalists cannot rely on the First Amendment or court precedents to protect them from censorship. Legal mandates can change according to political and social currents. For example, the courts were considerably more lenient in the 1970s than they have been in the 1990s. Moreover, in the case of private institutions, the courts have consistently refused to grant First Amendment protections.

The changing nature and ambiguity of the law increases the need for ethical decision-making skills that could eliminate the demand for legal controls. Journalists — collegiate or professional — should not be legally mandated to uphold the ideals of the free press, but they should have the ethical background for it. Improving ethical reasoning can avoid attempts at censorship and the legal battles that ensue. “Ethics deals with ideal behaviors, while law deals with minimal standards.”¹⁵

Newspaper Theft

In 1993, Howard Kurtz, who writes about the media for the *Washington Post*, wrote that “a new form of protest” had become “the rage on college campuses across the country: stealing dumping or burning student newspapers.”¹⁶ Newspaper theft, which burst onto the scene in the early 1990s, continues to plague the college media. Thefts have ranged from one or two bundles to the entire 23,000 press run of the *Daily Californian* newspaper, an act that cost the University of California at Berkeley paper an estimated \$15,000.¹⁷

The theft of newspapers has emerged as a major problem on many college campuses. According to the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, a nonprofit group in Washington dedicated to academic freedom, 453,123 newspapers were either stolen or destroyed at 121 campuses between 1992 and 1998.¹⁸ Reports of newspapers disappearing, usually because somebody objected to what was in them, doubled to about 40 in the last year. Most of these actions went unpunished, even though the legal system does consider such incidents as theft.¹⁹

Although this form of censorship is intolerable, campus newspapers should recognize that it indicates frustration on the part of their audiences. In many cases, readers protest because they believe the college newspaper is not adhering to ethical standards or representing the views of the campus community. Student journalists should take steps to ensure that they are meeting these obligations before turning to legal intervention.

Censorship through Funding

Funding student publications is an endless and exhausting task. While professional newspapers operate through advertising revenue and subscription sales, few college newspapers could compete in the limited marketplace. The advertising base for a campus newspaper will never be as large as a metropolitan newspaper because its size and circulation is restricted to the college or university community.²⁰ Many campus newspapers also prefer not to charge for papers since subscription sales would add little income and surveys show that paid circulation would slash readership.²¹

Student publications usually combine funding from several sources, including: advertising revenue; subscription sales; allocations from college general funds or mandatory student fees; and income from typesetting, layout, and printing facilities. While the trend among college newspapers is to seek greater self-sufficiency through more advertising revenue, the vast majority must supplement their income with allocations. More than 90 percent of college newspapers receive subsidies from college general funds or student fees, and even several university dailies that are at or near the million-dollar advertising mark require subsidies.²²

Media scholars disagree over whether campus newspapers should accept these allocations. Some contend that subsidies compromise journalistic integrity, influence editorial content, and lead to censorship. In 1979, the student newspaper at the University of Minnesota at Twin Cities published a mock interview with Jesus that many found offensive. The next year, the president allowed students to take back the portion of their fees budgeted for the paper. Charging censorship, the newspaper sued, and in 1983 the

court ruled in its favor.²³ Despite the court victory, the case underscored the problems of fiscal dependence.

Others argue that without adequate support, few campus newspapers could improve in quality and most would go bankrupt. In the 1970s, the *Spectator* at Columbia University in New York chose to decline student funding. However, the paper soon experienced financial problems. It ended up borrowing thousands of dollars from the university to buy equipment, then defaulted on the loan.²⁴ In a report on the campus press, Thomas C. Fischer argued that fiscal independence should not be the ultimate goal for all newspapers. “Realistically, not every college would want, or could afford, to separate its student press from institutional support and functions,” he wrote.²⁵

However, media scholars on both sides agree that subsidies can be used to manipulate the campus press. Although the courts have stopped most attempts to censor through funding, student journalists should not assume that they are in the clear. Most rulings have applied only to administrative attempts to withdraw funding; this does not prevent the student body or student government from voting to repeal funding or choosing to contract with another publication.

Campus newspapers should recognize that while they hold a captive audience, they must also be responsive and accountable to their readership. It would be irresponsible and unethical to accept funds from readers while ignoring their interests and tastes. A college newspaper should never act as a public relations arm for the university or as a mouthpiece for student government; however, it would be well served to reflect the legitimate interests of its major audience.

The Myth of Independence

Since the 1970s, some college newspapers have incorporated to become “independent” of their college or university. By establishing the newspaper as a separate legal entity, many student journalists thought they would benefit from editorial independence, financing learned through market forces, and an escape from administrative control. University officials also encouraged incorporation because they would no longer be responsible for funding student publications or handling embarrassing or libelous mistakes.

The reality, however, is somewhat different. Corporations are legally established according to specific steps as outlined by state laws and must file articles of incorporation. These articles can determine the precise university relationship, fund allocations and other legal aspects. If any part of the articles stipulates a university relationship or connection, then the newspaper cannot be considered independent. Indeed, restrictive provisions can and have been written into the articles of incorporation. Thus, incorporation can mean independence or dependence.²⁶

More important, incorporation does not guarantee financial freedom. Few college newspapers are truly independent. Most “independent” college newspapers still receive subsidies, with the difference being that such allocations are treated as circulation income. Student government usually agrees to allocate a certain amount of mandatory fees to the publication for providing specified numbers of copies for campus-wide distribution. In effect, students still exert monetary control over the campus newspaper.

This does not mean that college newspapers should refuse subsidies. There are many subsidized campus newspapers that are truly independent in their news and commentary, and there are many “independent” newspapers that are circumscribed by partisan or administration interests.²⁷ A more accepted definition of independence in describing campus newspapers refers to news and editorial policy rather than fiscal solvency. As Louise E. Ingelhart wrote: “The true measure of being an independent voice and exercising the constitutional right of a free press resides in the ability of a college publication to publish its views of the college world and the larger world in its own way without prior restraint or subsequent punishment.”²⁸

Suggestions for Codes

An appropriate and effective code can minimize the need for cumbersome and intrusive attempts at censorship. Student journalists should recognize that ethical reasoning is preferable to legal mandates. Codes should require that the campus newspaper be accountable and responsive to its audience, with the understanding that it would be unethical to accept student funds without regard to readers’ interests and concerns. At the same time, codes should make it clear that while the campus newspaper may receive subsidies, it will maintain an independent editorial voice.

A caveat: School administrators, student government officials, or others outside the newsroom may cite codes to justify their attempts to fire student editors, suspend funding, or censor copy.²⁹ Ethics codes were never intended to be externally enforced.³⁰ If reporters act in an unfair manner or allow a conflict of interest to interfere with their reporting, then they should be held accountable. However, the actual punishment for such

violations should be the sole responsibility of the newspaper staff — not student government or the administration. Campus newspapers should include a provision that describes codes as quality controls rather than as arbiters of subject matter.

Notes

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² Larry Atkins, "Free Press for All — Even Students," *Plain Dealer* 28 Feb. 1999: D1, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

³ Nakamura B6.

⁴ Julius Duscha and Thomas C. Fischer, *The Campus Press: Freedom and Responsibility* (Washington, DC: American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 1973) 22.

⁵ Duscha and Fischer 22.

⁶ Wayne Overbeck and Thomas M. Pasqua, Jr. *Excellence in College Journalism* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1983) 215.

⁷ Overbeck and Pasqua 215.

⁸ Louise E. Ingelhart, *Student Publications: Legalities, Governance, and Operation*, 1st ed. (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1993) 95-96.

⁹ Overbeck and Pasqua 215.

¹⁰ Ingelhart 100.

¹¹ Atkins D1.

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¹³ Robert Trager, *Student Press Rights* (Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, 1974) 8.

¹⁴ Atkins D1.

¹⁵ Monica Hill and Bonnie Thrasher, "A Model of Respect: Beyond Political Correctness in the Campus Newsroom," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 9.1 (1994): 46.

¹⁶ Tracy Breton, "Student Newspaper Freedoms Assaulted," *Providence Journal* 27 Dec. 1998: A22, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

¹⁷ Mike Hiestand, "It's the Law," *Trends* 77.4 (March/April 1998): 3.

¹⁸ Abby Ellin, "Blackboard: The Media" *New York Times* 3 Jan. 1999, late ed.: A4, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

¹⁹ Hiestand, "It's the Law," *Trends* 77.4 (March/April 1998) 4.

²⁰ Duscha and Fischer 13.

²¹ Ingelhart 18.

²² Ingelhart 48-49.

²³ Rhonda Stewart, "Court Rulings Spur Growth in Campus Censorship," *The Nation* 5 Oct. 1998: n. pag., Expanded Academic Index, online, U. of Oregon Lib., 28 Feb. 1999.

²⁴ Ingelhart 46.

²⁵ Duscha and Fischer 66

²⁶ Ingelhart 64

²⁷ Ingelhart 19.

²⁸ Ingelhart 43.

²⁹ Mike Hiestand, "It's the Law," *Trends* 78.2 (1998): 3.

³⁰ Hiestand, "It's the Law," *Trends* 78.2 (1998): 3.

CHAPTER IV

PROFESSIONAL STATUS

A photographer for *The Post*, the campus newspaper at Ohio University in Athens, was called to the scene of an accident at 2:30 a.m. He expected to find a fender-bender. Instead, it turned out to be the worst accident involving students in over 20 years. Five students were speeding up an on-ramp when the driver lost control of the car, throwing them more than 50 feet onto the highway. No one was wearing a seat belt. Three students lost their lives and another one died two days later in the hospital. A test revealed that the driver had a blood-alcohol content of .24.

With the negatives in hand, the editorial board agreed to run a picture of a dead body in a blood-stained sheet for the first time in the history of the newspaper. They believed the graphic photo would aptly illustrate the dangers of drinking and driving. However, readers harshly criticized the decision, arguing that the photo was insensitive and inappropriate for a campus newspaper. “As I tried to explain to those who called, news doesn’t stay in the ‘real world,’ it often knocks on the door of college life,” wrote photographer John F. Martin. “As the student newspaper, it is our job to report it — just like ‘real’ papers do.”¹

Although there are differences between campus newspapers and professional newspapers, such as readership, financial base, and journalistic experience, they also have a great deal in common. Both have a certain responsibility to “inform, educate and entertain,” and to present the news fully and fairly.² Both face the same fundamental

obligations to work toward the common good and to serve their communities. And both must strive to meet ethical standards in journalism. In this sense, the college newspaper is a “real newspaper.”

However, student journalists sometimes fail to take these responsibilities seriously. More than a few campus newspapers have printed material intended to alienate and antagonize readers. Some have exhibited extremely poor taste and judgment. Still others have delighted in sophomoric antics and pranks. As a consequence, campus newspapers have been criticized for being irresponsible and immature “rags” that have no business going to print. Even college publications that are sincere about journalistic ethics and professional integrity labor under this tarnished reputation.

The campus press could improve its image if it exercised those standards adhered to in professional organizations. Student journalists need to demonstrate the same competence and commitment as their professional counterparts. “After all, the campus newsroom is a training ground,” wrote Paul Delaney, a former senior editor for *New York Times*, “and when these students are hired as professionals, they are going to be expected to act like professionals.”³

Responsibility to Communicate

There are more than 100 student dailies operating in the United States, and more than 1,000 when college weeklies are included in that number.⁴ They range from mass-circulation dailies printed five times a week to photocopied publications issued once a term. A campus weekly may have neither a computer nor a newsroom, while a university daily may have a networked computer system, a spacious office in the student union and a

hundred staff members. For example, the *Harvard Crimson* is a daily broadsheet with revenue of more than \$1 million and a president who sits in an office adorned with correspondence from Harry Truman, while the *Berkeley Beacon* is a weekly tabloid that takes in about \$50,000 a year and is run out of a cramped room at the top a winding staircase.⁵

However, college newspapers are all alike in their basic functions. They serve as the paper of record for the campus community through news, information, and opinion. They guard the educational process by monitoring the actions of the administration, faculty, and student government. And they provide an open forum for public debate on college campuses. Herman A. Estrin wrote that the college newspaper is “an instrument which has a particular and important place in an educational institution. In many ways the college paper expresses the policies and purposes of the institution, and reflects the effect of the educational process upon its students.”⁶

Not all student journalists understand that it is the responsibility of the campus press to facilitate communication. Indeed, some college newspapers have employed language and visual images with the intent of alienating their audience and, in particular, the administration. In October, *The Academy*, the student newspaper at Georgetown University, called for the resignation of the university’s president for overseeing a school that, despite its administration by Jesuits, “seems hellbent on repudiating their religious, moral and educational values.”⁷ Many student were angered by the editorial, and some showed their dissatisfaction by stealing almost 3,000 copies of the newspaper.⁸

Like the professional press, the campus press has the responsibility to inform its readers, and in executing that duty, it can sometimes offend. If the campus newspaper does its job well, it will sometimes spark debate, make readers cringe, or infuriate the subjects of criticism. As a forum for the exchange of ideas, however, the campus press should not try to antagonize readers or use language that is calculated to embitter or cause enmity. As Thomas C. Fischer wrote, “The point of the article will not be well made if the reader is alienated by the first line.”⁹ Campus newspapers have the responsibility to encourage communication — not detract from it.

Standards of Good Taste

The law dictates that the press avoid libelous, slanderous, obscene, and pornographic material, and “fighting words” or other enticements to violence.¹⁰ However, the courts cannot set standards for good taste. Apart from legal restrictions, professional journalists recognize that they cannot afford to offend their readership with profanity, nudity, and other material published in poor taste. Thus, professional news organizations set standards of taste in response to their appeal and credibility in the marketplace.

These indicators are removed for most college publications because they are sustained by subsidies. Students seldom get to voice their approval or disapproval through subscription sales. As a result, some campus newspapers have become exceedingly lax about standards of taste. The University of Minnesota at Duluth student newspaper printed a joke edition that included stories on fictional groups such the “Duluth White Man’s Militia” and the “Ugly Lesbo Gay Bastard Association.” Student backlash prompted Ron Hustvedt, the editor of *The Statesman*, to make a formal apology.

“While a lot of the stories were tasteless and sophomoric, I thought people would understand it was an attempt to be humorous,” Hustvedt explained.¹¹

College communities are not just cross-sections of society at large. The intellectual level of students as well as faculty members is, or at least should be, substantially higher than the average intellect in society as a whole. It follows then that the campus press should set higher standards for itself than those minimum standards of taste that prevail in the general society. Campus newspapers serve an educated community striving for high intellectual achievement and should set standards of communication that are higher than the lowest common denominator that exists for society as a whole.¹²

Legal Considerations

The number of legal cases involving campus newspapers is still relatively small in comparison to the professional press. In the cases that do exist, however, the courts have made no distinction between the legitimate objectives of the campus press and those of the professional press, nor have they distinguished the legal status of the two institutions.¹³ Moreover, several cases have established that student editors will be held to the same journalistic standards as members of the professional press.¹⁴

Of course, this has mixed results for the campus press. According to the legal system, students are entitled to the same status, credibility, and opportunity to pursue the news as members of the professional press. This is a welcome change for student journalists who have for far too long been treated as second-class citizens, denied access

to important news events, and relegated to trivial stories that have traditionally been the substance of college and university newspapers.

At the same time, the immunity from public condemnation and legal accountability that student journalists have enjoyed seems to be breaking down. The courts have introduced a new measure of responsibility into the journalism field. For example, in most cases college publications are no longer sheltered from the impact of civil and criminal suits by their host institutions.¹⁵ College journalists should be aware that if they are to receive the same advantages as professional journalists, then they must suffer the same responsibilities.

Suggestions for Codes

College newspapers should include provisions that require staff members to conduct themselves in a professional manner. Jokes, pranks, and other obvious signs of irresponsible and reckless behavior should be prohibited. Codes should also reflect the responsibility of the campus press to encourage communication in the campus community. College newspapers should respect their readership and refrain from attempts to alienate or antagonize their audience. Finally, codes should set some standards of taste with regard to the scope of the publication and the interests of its readers. Staff members should understand the guidelines concerning profanity, nudity, and other controversial material.

Notes

¹ John F. Martin, "Students Blasted for Use of Gory Accident Photos," *News Photographer* Aug. 1996: n. pag., *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 4 Apr. 1999.

² Julius Duscha and Thomas C. Fischer, *The Campus Press: Freedom and Responsibility* (Washington, DC: American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 1973) 57.

³ Monica Hill and Bonnie Thrasher, "A Model of Respect: Beyond Political Correctness in the Campus Newsroom," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 9.1 (1994) 49.

⁴ Don Corrigan, "College Newspapers Have Unfair Advantage," *St. Louis Journalism Review* Dec. 1998: n. pag., *Expanded Academic Index*, online, U. of Oregon Lib.s, 28 Feb. 1999.

⁵ Mark Jurkowitz, "Is Anyone Reading the Campus Daily?" *The Boston Globe* 16 Oct. 1997: E1, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

⁶ Herman A. Estrin, "What Is a College Newspaper?" *Freedom and Censorship of the College Press*, ed. Herman A. Estrin and Arthur M. Sanderson (Dubuque, IA: W.C. Brown, 1966) 14.

⁷ Abby Ellin, "Blackboard: The Media," *New York Times* 3 Jan. 1999, late ed.: A4, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

⁸ Ellin A4.

⁹ Duscha and Fischer 74.

¹⁰ Duscha and Fisher 75.

¹¹ Andrew Tellijohn, "April Fool's Not Always Laughing Matter," *Trends* 75.3 (1996): 11

¹² Duscha and Fischer 82.

¹³ Duscha and Fischer 55-56.

¹⁴ Duscha and Fischer 56.

¹⁵ Duscha and Fischer 56.

CHAPTER V

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Hannah Allam, the first African-American editor of the University of Oklahoma's campus newspaper, had to decide whether to publish an editorial on race relations. In it, a controversial columnist voiced his support for white people who help African Americans, even though they risk ostracism and verbal attacks. Allam thought the columnist had a valid point, but she believed readers would object to seeing the words "nigger lover" 23 times in print. In fact, a race riot had erupted on campus the last time the columnist wrote an editorial for the *Oklahoma Daily*. After discussing her concerns with the columnist, Allam chose not to run the editorial. She argued that it would strain race relations and possibly endanger students. Other African-American students, however, disagreed with her decision. Allam wrote:

The outcry I received from my (African-American) community was totally unexpected. Several people called me a censor and a sell-out. But I feel I made the right decision. No way would I have allowed a column by a white person to run in which the word "nigger" was used repetitively. I was not trying to censor his argument, but to present it in a way that was palatable for an audience of 22,000 and in a way that conformed to our standards. ...

Running the unedited version of the column would have further stretched the already taut race relations on campus and definitely would not have minimized harm. Caving to the pressures of my black friends would have compromised my ethical journalistic standards and would not have been independent decision-making.¹

One of the more pressing challenges facing college newspapers is achieving resonance and relevance on campuses fragmented by race, gender, and sexual orientation. Student journalists often struggle to reach all members of their diverse audiences without offending different cultural groups. "We want to be the voice of the community," said

Joshua J. Schanker, a former president of the *Crimson*, Harvard University's student newspaper. "But it's very difficult to cover a very stratified campus and satisfy all those different divisions."²

The combustible mix of young adults and identity politics has led to an atmosphere of heightened cultural awareness on college campuses. In the 1990s, "political correctness" has emerged as a national movement aimed at combating complacency and crushing insensitivity.³ It has gained momentum as students, faculty, and administrators find themselves redrawing ideological and cultural lines. In this shifting social climate, the campus press has had to deal with difficult decisions regarding politically correct and incorrect material.

Evidence suggests that student journalists are having trouble understanding issues and events outside their cultural experience. Many campus newspapers have been criticized for publishing material considered racist, sexist, or homophobic:

- A cartoon and column in Saddleback Community College's weekly campus newspaper criticized Israel's "fanatical" government for waging a "holy war" with the Palestinians. Protesters called the item anti-Semitic.⁴
- Students at Cornell University burned issues of the campus paper the *Cornell Review* after it printed a cartoon titled "Which One Of These Kills More Blacks?" It contained three panels: One showed a Ku Klux Klan murder-by fire; the second summoned followers of Hitler in front of a large swastika; and the third showed a doctor about to perform an abortion in front of a sign that read: "Planned Parenthood Abortion Clinic."⁵
- The student media board at the University of Denver abolished the campus newspaper the *Clarion* after it printed offensive jokes regarding women. The jokes included: "Q: Why can't you trust a

woman? A: How can you trust something that bleeds for five days and doesn't die?"⁶

These and other ethical improprieties indicate that student journalists often lack sound news reasoning, sensitivity to the concerns of their multicultural audience, and an awareness of the impact of the mass media.⁷ Some student journalists have come under attack for defending their right to print controversial information regardless of the ramifications. They have argued that free speech should override all concerns about social responsibility. Others believe that they are obligated to print such material and that it would constitute outright censorship to do otherwise. Such reasoning reveals confusion and misinterpretation of First Amendment rights.

Although political correctness poses a serious challenge for the campus press, student journalists can develop an ethical approach that seeks to balance free speech and social responsibility. Decisions that are based on cultural tolerance, sound news judgment, and legal understanding can prevent serious repercussions for both the college newspaper as well as the campus community. College newspapers should recognize their pivotal role in bridging cultural divides rather than creating campus divisions.

The PC Debate

As tensions among students, faculty, and administrators over cultural barriers have increased, proponents of political correctness have sought changes in the campus environment. Colleges and universities have implemented controversial policies and practices influenced by multiculturalism, including: speech codes that restrict insensitive terminology; hiring and admissions guidelines that seek to make campuses

demographically representative; course requirements that emphasize multicultural experiences; and sensitivity training for students and faculty.⁸ These strategies have led to heated debate over political correctness and academic freedom on college campuses.

Proponents of political correctness argue that multiculturalism has enriched higher education. They believe that curriculum and policy reform has made college campuses more diverse and tolerant, as well as provided a more truthful account of the nation's history and cultural heritage.⁹ On the other side, critics argue that colleges and universities are enforcing civility at the expense of free speech and academic freedom. They perceive that political correctness has created a hostile and fearful atmosphere while lowering overall academic standards.

Student journalists may interpret political correctness as a threat to their First Amendment rights. Indeed, there are examples of politically correct extremism that have affected editorial decision-making. In 1995, students at DePaul University in Chicago staged a sit-in after the campus newspaper printed an article that they believed was racially biased. The *DePaulia* story about a brawl at a school dance said that “officers observed several MBs throwing chairs and trash into the crowd.” Some African-American students said the abbreviation — police shorthand for “male black” — was insulting. They demanded that one page each week be devoted to minority affairs and that once a year an entire issue be taken up with that theme. In response, the university president committed the paper to an annual issue addressing “the concerns of student of color” and directed a follow-up issue to be devoted entirely to coverage of the sit-in.¹⁰

The case shows that campus newspapers can forfeit their autonomy when they bend to politically correct pressures as well as lose the respect of their audiences. Rather than being caught on either side of the debate, student journalists need to develop sound ethical reasoning and sensitivity to multicultural concerns.¹¹ The campus press must move beyond political correctness to a politics of mutual understanding and respect. Using ethical reasoning in campus newsrooms should invoke tolerance for differences.¹²

Speech Codes

Since the political correctness debate emerged, more and more colleges and universities have considered methods of encouraging tolerance, respect, and equality on campus. In the 1980s, proponents of political correctness introduced speech codes to higher education. Such codes served as a legal means of maintaining political correctness by restricting “hate speech.”¹³ Students could be reprimanded or dismissed from campus for making derogatory comments based on race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. For example, the California university system passed a code that punished students for speech that interfered with the “victim’s ability to pursue effectively his or her education or otherwise participate fully in university programs and activities.”¹⁴ Under such policies, campus newspapers could be found in violation of speech codes.

As a legal edifice for maintaining political correctness, however, speech codes are crumbling. The courts have ruled that speech codes on several campuses are a threat to the First Amendment. In *Doe v. University of Michigan*, the first federal case, the court argued that a college or university cannot establish an anti-discrimination policy that has the effect of prohibiting speech because it disagreed with the ideas or messages being

conveyed.¹⁵ Even though the court agreed that the university was only trying to meet its “obligation to ensure equal educational opportunities for all of its students,” the court said that “such efforts must not be at the expense of free speech.”¹⁶

Although such rulings allow the campus press to exercise greater editorial freedom, the demise of speech codes further enhances the need for student journalists to develop ethical reasoning. The courts have ruled that college publications do not have to reflect, nor be representative of, the thinking of the administration or its students.¹⁷ College publications can print racist, sexist, and homophobic material without regard to the concerns of their audiences. Indeed, the campus press can publish content that is irresponsible and socially destructive.

Rather than arbitrarily exercising their editorial freedom, however, student journalists should strike a position between absolutist free speech and the need to create an appropriate learning environment. Student journalists should recognize their ethical duty to be sensitive to members of diverse cultural groups. As A. David Gordon writes, “Media that purport to serve a diverse, pluralistic society — and receive First Amendment protection to do so — have an ethical obligation to provide a spectrum of perspectives reflecting that pluralism.”¹⁸

Diversity in Newsrooms

One reason that student journalists should make special efforts to address multiculturalism is the lack of minority perspectives. Although no formal surveys of minority hiring have been conducted in campus newsrooms, colleges and universities as a whole have made few gains in minority enrollment. A 1995 report found that minority

students comprised about 25 percent of total enrollment in the United States.¹⁹ However, minority enrollment is growing at a slower pace than in the past, with the number of minority students increasing just 2.9 percent during that same year.²⁰

In addition, studies of professional newsrooms have painted a bleak picture. More than 30 years after the Kerner Commission urged the news media to train minority group members and promote them to decision-making positions, whites males are still the main occupants of those positions. One study revealed that early in the 1990s, a majority of U.S. newspapers still had *no* people of color on their professional staffs.²¹ Although more women and minorities are employed today in the news media, it is still rare to find them in decision-making roles.²²

College newspapers often find themselves in a similar situation, and have grappled with problems of race, gender, and ethnicity when sizing up their staffs. For example, the Harvard *Crimson* found that eight of its 10 columnists were Jewish in 1998, a figure they saw as evidence of the *Crimson*'s failure to represent the full range of views in the university community. Editors chose to expand the number of columnists to 16 and added more space for opinion pieces, which allowed for new Muslim, black, and female voices on the editorial page. "We have a diversity policy of inclusion, not exclusion," said Matthew W. Granade, a former president of the *Crimson*. "We never ask who is overrepresented in our pages. We ask who is underrepresented and make efforts to reach out to them."²³

The lack of diversity in campus newsrooms is another problem that increases the likelihood that campus journalists will make decisions that offend minorities. Until

campus newsrooms become better integrated with members of different cultural backgrounds, student journalists making the decisions must consider the information from the perspective of those who could be harmed or offended by its publication.²⁴

Suggestions for Codes

Codes in college newsrooms should articulate the need for inclusion, with the understanding that the campus newspaper should provide a forum for all students regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation. Also, provisions should prohibit stereotypes, derogatory remarks, and other insensitive language clearly aimed at women and minorities. Editorial decisions should be made out of respect for the views and concerns of diverse cultural groups. Finally, codes should emphasize social responsibility when making decisions about controversial or harmful material. Student journalists must recognize that while First Amendment protections allow them to publish racist, sexist and homophobic content, ethical reasoning demands that they balance free speech with multicultural concerns.

Notes

¹ Hannah Allam, e-mail to the author, 24 Feb. 1999.

² Mark Jurkowitz, "Is Anyone Reading the Campus Daily?" *The Boston Globe* 16 Oct. 1997: E1, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

³ Monica Hill and Bonnie Thrasher, "A Model of Respect: Beyond Political Correctness in the Campus Newsroom," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 9.1 (1994): 43-44.

⁴ Hill and Thrasher 45.

⁵ Nat Hentoff, "Students Burning Newspapers (Again)," *The Washington Post* 7 March 1998, final ed.: A19, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

⁶ Hill and Thrasher 45.

⁷ Hill and Thrasher 44.

⁸ National Association of Scholars, "The Wrong Way to Reduce Campus Tensions," *Beyond PC: Toward a Politics of Understanding*, ed. Patricia Aufderheide (St. Paul, MI: Graywolf Press, 1992) 7.

⁹ Teachers for a Democratic Culture, "Statement of Principles," *Beyond PC: Toward a Politics of Understanding*, ed. Patricia Aufderheide (St. Paul, MI: Graywolf Press, 1992) 67.

¹⁰ Mark Fitzgerald, "DePaul Students End Sit-in that Shut the Paper," *Editor & Publisher* 6 May 1995, n. pag., *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 4 Apr. 1999.

¹¹ Hill and Thrasher 46.

¹² Hill and Thrasher 46.

¹³ Jae-Jin Lee, "Understanding Hate Speech as a Communication Phenomenon: Another View on Campus Speech Code Issues," *Communications and the Law* 2 (1997): n. pag., *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 25 May 1999.

¹⁴ Nat Hentoff, "'Speech Codes' and Free Speech," *Beyond PC: Toward a Politics of Understanding*, ed. Patricia Aufderheide (St. Paul, MI: Graywolf Press, 1992) 7.

¹⁵ Jae-Jin Lee.

¹⁶ Jae-Jin Lee.

¹⁷ Louis E. Ingelhart, *Freedom for the College Student Press: Court Cases and Related Decisions Defining the Campus Fourth Estate Boundaries* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985) 207.

¹⁸ A. David Gordon, John M. Kittross, and Carol Reuss, *Controversies in Media Ethics*, overview and commentary by John C. Merrill (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1996) 144.

¹⁹ Ben Gose, "Minority Enrollments Rose in 1995, a Study Finds," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 23 May 1997: A38, *Expanded Academic Index*, online, U. of Oregon Lib., 20 May 1999.

²⁰ Gose A38.

²¹ Gordon, Kittross, and Reuss 143.

²² Gordon, Kittross, and Reuss 143.

²³ Michael A. Fletcher, "The Harvard Crimson's Diversity Issue; Columnist Claims Paper's Push for Less-Jewish Staff Led to Denial of Editorial Post," *The Washington Post* 17 Apr. 1999, final ed.: A8, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

²⁴ Hill and Thrasher 49-50.

CHAPTER VI

CRIMINAL MISCONDUCT

In October 1992, the student newspaper at Marshall University in West Virginia published the name and address of an alleged rape victim along with that of the accused. The story, which noted that the pair had engaged in consensual sex before the alleged assault, created a campus-wide uproar. “It was a matter of fairness,” explained Missy Rake, editor of the *Parthenon*. “If you treat rape differently from robbery or murder, you are giving up journalistic principles of consistency. There really isn’t any middle ground.”

Then, in January, a second woman was sexually assaulted. The *Parthenon* learned her identity and was prepared to publish her name when the campus exploded again, with various groups threatening to tear up the offending issue. Reacting to the uproar, the campus police immediately began withholding the names of crime victims. “The students at the *Parthenon* are amateurs,” said Donald Salyers, director of the campus police department. “If there is a serious crime, we are not going to keep it a secret. We just won’t release the names of the victims.”¹

The college newspaper can play a vital role in keeping the campus safe. It can alert students to potential danger and track crime trends. It can make sure that school officials deal with crime and offenders in an appropriate and effective manner. And it can focus attention on serious societal problems and the need to address them. In fulfilling these duties, however, the campus press must maintain a balance of informing the campus community about matters of legitimate concern while protecting the victim and accused.

Often the campus media encounter major obstacles in meeting that obligation. Federal and state laws may prevent student journalists from obtaining the information necessary to fairly and adequately report on crime. Moreover, school officials intent on shielding their institutions from the glare of the media spotlight can tangle the issue. As a consequence, student journalists routinely are denied access to important news and information that could affect the safety of the campus community.

At the same time, ethical improprieties are at the root of many problems student journalists have in gathering information. Some have resorted to publishing rumors and hearsay in their overzealous pursuit of crime stories. Others have failed to show fairness and compassion for those involved in criminal cases. Still others have derided and attacked faculty members for their misconduct. Colleges and universities have taken measures to restrict access to campus crime logs and disciplinary records in part because of concerns that student journalists will behave unethically.

Campus Crime Records

Campus newspapers often find that public records and student privacy clash when it comes to crime. Most public records and other official activities are open to media scrutiny under state sunshine laws and freedom of information statutes. However, some states have their own education laws protecting student privacy. In addition, the Family and Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), also called the Buckley Amendment, specifically prevents public colleges and universities from releasing information about students that can be “personally identifiable” in “educational records.”² Institutions that violate the amendment risk losing their eligibility for federal funding.³

Administrators have argued that FERPA shields campus crime records from public scrutiny because they contain personal information about students. In 1992, however, a federal court ruled that campus crime records were not educational records under FERPA, and ordered Southwest Missouri State University to make them available to the editor of the school newspaper.⁴ The *Bauer v. Kincaid* decision found constitutional problems with the special privacy status granted to student criminals, victims, and witnesses. As a result, Congress amended FERPA to reflect that campus crime records are not educational records.

Although FERPA generally favors student privacy, other federal legislation has come into conflict with it. In 1990, Congress passed the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act.⁵ Described as a “consumer protection bill for students,” the act was intended to make campus crime information available to students so that they could make educated decisions and take action to protect themselves.⁶ In particular, the law required colleges and universities to compile annual crime statistics and keep campus police logs open to the public.⁷

However, many schools have failed to comply with the federal mandate. A 1996 study found that just 37 percent of the 785 schools surveyed had made crime statistics available to prospective students.⁸ Critics contend that administrators are hiding crime statistics to portray their schools in a more positive light. In their defense, school officials argue that they face conflicting federal mandates. While the Campus Security Act requires that schools make crime information public, FERPA prevents them from receiving federal funding for releasing student records. Two state supreme courts,

however, have ruled that FERPA does not preclude reporting anonymous crime statistics.⁹

Even more troubling is mounting evidence that colleges and universities are excluding crime from their campus police logs. One recent study indicated that schools neglect to report as many as 75 percent of the crimes committed on campus.¹⁰ Several high-profile cases indicate that some schools are reluctant to provide the campus media with crime reports:

- In August 1997, Harvard police arrested Sung Hoon Cho, a 25-year-old male student, for allegedly raping a female student. Although the alleged rape was reported on the police blotter, it was not placed on the department's Internet log, the version that is most often picked by campus newspapers.¹¹
- In January, the student newspaper at the University of Maryland won a nearly three-year battle when officials released the parking violation records of student athletes. *The Diamondback* had been fighting for the records since February 1996, when basketball player Duane Simpkins was suspended for accepting a \$2,000 loan from a former coach to help pay off an estimated \$8,000 worth of campus parking tickets.¹²
- The death of freshman Scott L. Krueger from binge drinking at a fraternity party in September 1997 was never included on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology police logs sent to campus publications, even though his death had been quickly reported by Boston news media.¹³

School officials have cited problems with the campus media as justification for concealing information that could otherwise reflect poorly on their institutions. Indeed, frustration with their situation has prompted some student journalists to forgo the painstaking paper trail in their rush to publish crime stories. This has led to a loss of credibility and, in some cases, a libel suit. For example, the student newspaper at the University of Utah reported that the school was going to press charges against a student

government officer for stealing \$2,000 of a benefit concert's proceeds. Both accusations were false, and the student sued the newspaper for \$2 million.¹⁴

Student journalists should never allow obstacles to news gathering to lower their ethical standards. Campus newspapers must confirm crime stories through proper documentation or law enforcement officials — rumor and hearsay are no substitutes for solid reporting. Poor journalism supports the argument of administrators who think campus crime reports should be off limits to student journalists. Sound news judgment and solid reporting can eliminate reasons for further restrictions and prevent potential media blackouts.

Campus Discipline

Colleges and universities have instituted their own campus disciplinary systems for dealing with crime. Disciplinary courts often are responsible for handling students charged with conduct code violations. Most campus courts, which are composed of students, faculty members, and administrators, were set up to preside over minor infractions and academic offenses, such as cheating and plagiarism.¹⁵ However, disciplinary courts now consider more serious crimes involving theft, arson, and sexual assault.¹⁶ Penalties include censure, probation, suspension, expulsion, or referral to law enforcement agencies for prosecution.¹⁷

In most cases, campus disciplinary hearings and records are kept confidential unless the students involved agree to make them public. Although student crime records are not protected under FERPA, controversy remains about whether campus disciplinary records should receive privacy protection. College publications have gone to court in

several states seeking access to disciplinary proceedings. In 1993, the student newspaper at the University of Georgia sued to open disciplinary records.¹⁸ The state Supreme Court ruled that these records were not educational records. Rather, they were similar to records kept for law enforcement purposes and should be open to public scrutiny.¹⁹

Access to disciplinary proceedings is emerging as a major battleground as administrators increasingly shift serious offenses from the criminal justice system to the campus disciplinary system.²⁰ Some argue that the campus community has the right to know how schools are handling disciplinary matters and that publicity helps make sure that student offenders receive equal treatment for similar infractions.²¹ Others contend that publicizing such proceedings may discourage students from filing complaints and detract from the purpose of campus disciplinary procedures, which is to educate and guide student offenders, not just hand out punishment.²²

In either case, student journalists who have gained access to campus disciplinary proceedings quickly realize that they have stumbled onto an ethical minefield. Campus disciplinary systems have been criticized for setting different judicial standards than the criminal justice system. For example, some shift the burden of proof to the defendant in sexual misconduct cases. Others allow disciplinary courts to weigh the preponderance of evidence in criminal cases rather than judge the evidence to be “beyond a reasonable doubt.” As one school official commented, “The standard of proof in college courts is much lower than in the criminal court.”²³

This makes it even more difficult for student journalists to respect the privacy of the victim as well as be fair to the accused. In November 1997, a campus disciplinary

board expelled a University of Oregon student for sexual misconduct.²⁴ The ruling was based on the preponderance of evidence, and the student was never charged in a court of law. While the student appealed the decision, the *Oregon Daily Emerald* campus newspaper published his name but not those of the two women who testified against him. That fact was not lost on the student, who argued that fairness demanded that the paper either afford him the same privacy as his accusers or run their names along with his.²⁵

Student journalists fighting for open campus disciplinary proceedings will need to exercise caution. A disciplinary hearing is not the same as a court trial, and its academic ruling is not equivalent to a legal judgment. As students gain access to disciplinary proceedings, they will need to set stricter standards for fairness and privacy. In particular, campus newspaper will have to determine which parties will be identified and under what circumstances. Student journalists may find that covering campus disciplinary proceedings will test the limits of ethical reasoning.

Faculty Misconduct

While students commit most crime on campus,²⁶ faculty members and school officials also have been charged with misconduct. Their offenses have ranged from sexual harassment and pornography to grant fraud and embezzlement. However, most colleges and universities are reluctant to release evidence of criminal misconduct and often view such problems as personnel matters. Many administrators handle misconduct in private, preferring to discipline faculty members and school officials or discharge them from their positions rather than press formal charges.²⁷

Student journalists argue that this approach conceals problems that affect the entire campus community. Some contend that students have a vested interest in the quality of their education and a right to know how their professors perform both in and outside the classroom. Others point out that faculty members and school officials hold important positions of public visibility and trust and should be held to higher standards.²⁸ Still others argue that they would be abandoning their role as watchdogs if they failed to report on public school officials.

At the same time, most student journalists are concerned about the repercussions. Covering faculty misconduct places them in the uncomfortable position of reporting on those with authority over them. Indeed, school officials have squelched stories and sought retribution by interfering in the operations of the campus newspaper. In 1998, the administration at Fort Valley State University dismissed the adviser of the student newspaper after it investigated the university's vice president for academic affairs. The article chronicled her three years as president of York College in Queens, New York, where she resigned in 1994 in the wake of an audit accusing her of questionable financial practices.²⁹

Although student journalists may resent their subordinate position, they should never allow vindictiveness to cloud their news decisions. Students are a part of an institution that thrives on fair exchange and criticism. Thus, campus newspapers should treat all criminal offenders — students, professors, and even administrators — the same in both their professional dealings and in their newspaper coverage. The student

newspaper at California State University at Fullerton held a story about professor to await the outcome of the charges. *Daily Titan* editor Kelly Murray wrote:

We got a tip on a CSUF professor getting busted for downloading child pornography on his office computer. After discussing the story with our adviser and communications law professor, I decided to hold the story and wait to see if the case was going to trial. I knew that this was fairly mild stuff, but it would still ruin his reputation if we ran with the story.

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In keeping with that spirit, the campus newspaper should never rush to condemn faculty members or school officials.

Suggestions for Codes

Codes should emphasize judgment, sensitivity, and diligence in covering campus crime. Student journalists must substantiate allegations of criminal wrong-doing through proper documentation and official sources. Codes should also articulate the importance of fairness, privacy and compassion in covering both the criminal justice system and the campus disciplinary system. Provisions should include standards for identifying the victim as well as the accused, especially in sensitive cases involving sexual misconduct. Finally, codes should guarantee equal news treatment for all criminal offenders regardless of their respective positions in the college or university.

Notes

¹ Mark Jurkowitz, "Is Anyone Reading the Campus Daily?" *Boston Globe* 16 Oct. 1997, city ed.: E1, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

² "Miami University Loses Records-Disclosure Case; Student Paper Allowed to See Discipline Files." *Plain Dealer* 9 Dec. 1997, final ed.: B5, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

³ Michael C. Smith and Richard Fossey, *Crime on Campus: Legal Issues and Campus Administration* (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1995) 217.

⁴ Smith and Fossey 217.

⁵ Robyn Gearey, "College Cop-out: Closing the Books on Campus Crime," *New Republic* 10 Nov. 1997: n. pag., *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 20 May 1999.

⁶ Smith and Fossey 219.

⁷ Richard Chacon, "MIT Police Say Logs Omitted Off-campus Crimes," *Boston Globe* 4 Apr. 1998, city ed.: B6, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

⁸ Gearey.

⁹ Gearey.

¹⁰ Gearey.

¹¹ Chacon A1.

¹² Andrew Tellijohn, "Maryland Paper Wins Three-Year Battle to Release Parking Records," *Trends* 78.3 (March 1999) 1.

¹³ Chacon A1.

¹⁴ Louis E. Ingelhart, *Freedom for the College Student Press: Court Cases and Related Decisions Defining the Campus Fourth Estate Boundaries* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985) 130.

¹⁵ Jane Kirtley, "Shedding Light on Campus Crime," *American Journalism Review* 19.6 (1997): 50, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 25 May 1999.

¹⁶ Kirtley 50.

¹⁷ Allan Wolper, "Private Courts Face Public Scrutiny," *Editor & Publisher* 2 Nov. 1996: n. pag., *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 20 May 1999.

¹⁸ Wolper.

¹⁹ "Miami University Loses Records-Disclosure Case; Student Paper Allowed to See Discipline Files," *Plain Dealer* 9 Dec. 1997, final ed.: B5, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

²⁰ George Garneau, "Top 10 Threats to Campus Press," *Editor & Publisher* 17 Dec. 1994: n. pag., *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 5 May 1999.

²¹ Smith and Fossey 217.

²² Smith and Fossey 217.

²³ Wolper.

²⁴ Laura Cadiz, "Student Charged with Sexual Misconduct," *Oregon Daily Emerald* 18 Nov. 1997, online <<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~ode/>> 23 Apr. 1999.

²⁵ The author worked as an editor for the *Oregon Daily Emerald* between January 1996 and December 1998. Although the complaints were undocumented, the student voiced his grievances to an *Emerald* reporter covering his disciplinary hearings.

²⁶ Smith and Fossey 63.

²⁷ Smith and Fossey 79.

²⁸ Smith and Fossey 79.

²⁹ Ernie Suggs, "College Newspaper Losing Its Adviser; Fort Valley Dismisses Professor; His Work with the Peachite Suspected to Be a Factor," *Atlanta Constitution* 23 May 1998, final ed.: D7, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

³⁰ Murray, Kerry. E-mail to the author. 15 Mar. 1999.

CHAPTER VII

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ADVERTISING

For three years, the student newspaper at Georgia State University has run advertisements questioning the existence of the Holocaust. The most recent ad offered \$250,000 to anyone who could arrange a televised debate between the Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust and the Anti-Defamation League, which combats anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination, on such issues as whether gas chambers were used to exterminate Jews and if *The Diary of Anne Frank* is fiction. Hoping to pressure the *Signal* to stop accepting the ads, the student government passed a resolution that “categorically rejects the position that the Holocaust did not take place.”

Although the newspaper staff did not agree with the views expressed in the advertisement, editor Jennifer Smith argued that ads should not be rejected because of offensive or unpopular political views. “As supporters of free speech, the *Signal* does not feel any paper, administrator, faculty group or individual has the right to determine which opinion is worthy of being heard and which is not,” Smith said. “The fact that a particular opinion might be offensive to someone does not excuse censorship in any form.”¹

One of the most controversial ethical aspects of campus newspapers is the content of some advertising. Most college publications run ads that promote harmful products, unpopular political opinions, and sexually explicit products or entertainment. On some campuses, newspapers have come under fire for accepting ads from alcohol and tobacco companies, abortion clinics, and anti-affirmative action groups. In these cases, student

journalists have been lambasted for sending messages that some readers deem unethical and socially irresponsible.

Many critics argue that campus newspapers have an obligation to consider their college readership. Some contend that while college students are considered “adults,” their overall youth and inexperience make them more susceptible to persuasive messages. Others argue that their sudden independence encourages them to try out risky and unhealthy behaviors. Still others point out that their lifestyle, needs, and spending habits make them particularly vulnerable targets for advertisers. Even more so than the professional press, the campus press is under tremendous pressure to evaluate the impact of advertising on its audience.

At the same time, most college newspapers rely on advertising dollars to sustain their operations. Student editors contend that many college publications cannot afford to reject advertising dollars. They argue that taking a stance on any advertisement may eventually lead them down “the slippery slope” to bankruptcy. And they point out that newspapers that scale back advertising may have to rely more heavily on college or student fee subsidies, which can compromise their integrity in other ways (see Chapter III).

Advertising Control

Campus newspapers are liable for the content of advertisements and must make informed decisions about accepting or rejecting them.² In general, however, student editors have less control over the ad stacks than the editorial page. Their decisions about advertising are constrained by the nature of the institution, the administration, and the

structure of the newspaper. In many campus newsrooms, student editors have not determined who has control — or more important — should have control over advertising.

On many campuses, the administration may make decisions about the content of advertising. Because private schools are not protected under the First Amendment, they are more likely to face restrictions on advertising than are public schools. The courts have ruled that college officials as well as student editors can reject advertisements without giving reasons.³ Indeed, it is not unusual for an administrator who would never tamper with the editorial page to prohibit advertisements for cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, contraceptives and similar products.

At public institutions, however, only student editors can reject advertisements.⁴ School officials cannot censor advertising because their interference constitutes “state action.” In 1981, a federal judge in Oregon ruled that no public college official could bar an advertisement that offered abortion referrals. The case arose after the newspaper adviser at Portland Community College denied a woman advertising space, even though the paper ran anti-abortion advertisements.⁵

Apart from administrative control, campus newspapers at both public and private schools are not always clear about who has control *within* the news organization. Many college newspaper advertising staffs are supervised directly by college employees and do not have the same policy-making independence as the editorial staff. Advertising policy decisions may be made by professional business managers with little or not input from students.⁶

Moreover, many campus newspapers have not determined the boundaries between the business and editorial departments. Professional news organizations separate the departments to prevent either one from interfering in the operations of the other. When questions arise about the content of advertising, a publisher that overrides both departments makes the final decisions.⁷ However, campus newspapers rarely have a formal “publisher,” which can create conflicts between the editorial and advertising departments.

For example, the *Michigan Daily* at the University of Michigan was the setting for a heated debate as the business and editorial departments squared off in an ethical struggle over tobacco advertising. The newspaper’s advisory board tried to strike a compromise by giving the editorial department control of ad content above the fold and allowed the business section to rule on material elsewhere in the paper. The editorial department, however, responded by running anti-tobacco wire copy adjacent to tobacco ads.⁸

Student journalists must set boundaries for regulating advertising content if they are to make responsible and informed decisions. Campus newspapers at private schools should reach an agreement with the administration on standards of acceptability. Within the news organization, students should have some input in advertising decisions, while avoiding turf battles with other departments. Preferably, students in both the business and editorial departments should agree on an acceptable decision-making process when it comes to controversial advertising.

Positive Behavior

One of the major concerns of the campus media is whether they should promote positive behavior. Although college students seek independence and autonomy, most administrators, professors, and parents think they need help making responsible choices. They believe college students need to learn about the dangers of unsafe sex, smoking, alcohol and drug use, and other risk behaviors. And they look to the college newspaper as the dominant campus medium to send and reinforce messages that promote physical and emotional well-being.

Most campus newspapers recognize their role in promoting positive behavior. Indeed, college publications often publish articles to raise awareness about problems such as binge drinking and date rape. However, their main focus is on editorial content rather than on advertising. As a consequence, many campus newspapers routinely accept advertisements that appear to contradict their editorial messages about responsible behavior. In particular, campus newspapers run ads for products that some deem harmful to potential users.

Perhaps the most obvious example is the prevalence of alcohol and tobacco advertisements in college newspapers. The campus media receive an estimated 35 percent of their advertising revenue from alcohol-related ads, and tobacco products are not far behind.⁹ Many campus-area bars place advertisements in students newspapers announcing “all you can drink” and “two-fers” aimed at the campus crowd.¹⁰ Tobacco companies also have started advertising smokeless tobacco in college newspapers, breaking their self-imposed ban on advertising in these publications.¹¹

On many campuses, accepting these advertisements has become a fiercely debated issue. Some students, faculty members, and administrators argue that drinking and tobacco use pose serious health hazards and should not be promoted in a college newspaper. They contend that college students are at high risk for these unhealthy behaviors and that campus publications should not profit from them. And they point out that promotions for campus bars, beer specials, and free tobacco samples undermine efforts to reduce drinking and tobacco use on college campuses.

Some newspapers have agreed with them and have banned such advertisements. The *State News* at Michigan State University said it would “not longer accept advertising that features offers for free tobacco products” after it was criticized by the state attorney general for an insert offering a free can of Copenhagen. “You can argue the right of tobacco to be sold and the right of choice and pontificate all you want,” Frank Kelly wrote in a letter to the editor. “But being part of the tobacco secret agenda to seduce young people is socially and ethically reprehensible.”¹²

Other campus newspapers have chosen not to follow suit. Some student journalists point out that their papers need the revenue from these advertisements to continue operating. They also argue that the advertising dollars will only go to other mainstream media if they do not accept them. And they believe that college students should make their own decisions about alcohol and tobacco. Despite pressure from other campus media, the student newspaper at Louisiana State elected to continue running alcohol advertisements. “We allow it all,” said editor Wayne Lewis. “We’ve always had the policy that it is a legal product, we are a college and people are going to drink.”¹³

Although few campus newspapers could afford to reject all advertisements for harmful products, they can set some standards for acceptability. For example, a campus newspaper may accept advertising from bars publicizing bands and other special events but refuse those that promote irresponsible drinking. A similar approach could apply to tobacco advertisements. Student journalists could turn away ads that offer free smokeless tobacco samples, while accepting those that are clearly aimed at an adult audience. Campus newspapers cannot afford to assume an absolutist position on advertising, but they can employ ethical reasoning to minimize harm and promote positive behavior.

Offensive Advertising

Many campus newspapers accept advertising that is deemed offensive or demeaning to various cultural groups. As with editorial content that carries similar messages, these advertisements can enter into the arena of political correctness (see Chapter V). Some campus newspapers have infuriated their readers with ads that promote Holocaust revisionism and anti-affirmative action initiatives. Students, administrators, and faculty have demanded that campus newspaper refuse such advertisements.

Although the First Amendment protects advertising that advocates ideas, expresses opinions, or is political in nature, campus newspapers can turn down offensive political ads based on the “consequences” of publishing them.¹⁴ For many campus newspapers, however, these advertisements represent a choice between competing ethical ideals. Most college newspapers regard ad columns as an open forum for free speech, and

they welcome unpopular political views along with popular ones. At the same time, they want to shield their audiences from offensive opinions that can cause harm.

Student editors agonize over advertisements that conflict with their responsibilities to both inform and protect their readers. Some argue that the best remedy for offensive advertisements is not to impose restrictions, but rather to further comment and discussion. For example, the student newspaper at the University of Maine decided on this course when it ran an ad submitted by the Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust. *Main Daily* editor Misty Edgecomb wrote:

We decided that it would be too much censorship not to print it just because we (the editorial board) think he's crazy, so we decided to run it with a box round it reading "this is a paid advertisement" with a commentary (explaining why we printed it and what we think of it) signed by the editorial board printed in an ad next to it.¹⁵

However, many student editors refused similar advertisements on other grounds. In particular, some argued that political ads should be subject to standards of truth and substance. They argued that the Holocaust ads distorted or perverted historical truths, and thus should not be protected speech.

Although these arguments have merit, campus newspapers should apply the same standards to advertising that they do to editorial content. For example, campus newspapers that prohibit articles that are sexist, racist, or homophobic should extend these same principles to advertising. Student editors that would never publish a column or cartoon denying the Holocaust should not find themselves in the position of running an advertisement that espouses that idea. An artificial line should not be drawn between advertising and editorial content — some standards of acceptability should be in place throughout the paper.

Suggestions for Codes

Codes should state that campus newspapers can accept or refuse advertising based on content. Provisions should determine who has the right to make these decisions and establish a process that coordinates decision-making between newspaper departments. In addition, campus newspapers at private schools should agree on an advertising policy with the administration that allows for minimal interference. Codes also should set some standards for advertising acceptability that balance social responsibility and financial concerns. Some standards should be consistent for both advertising and editorial content.

Notes

¹ Ernie Suggs, "College Newspaper Losing Its Adviser," *Atlanta Constitution* 23 May 1998, final ed.: D7, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

² Louis E. Ingelhart, *Freedom for the College Student Press: Court Cases and Related Decisions Defining the Campus Fourth Estate Boundaries* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985) 173.

³ Ingelhart 173.

⁴ Hiestand, Mike. "It's the Law," *Trends* 77.5 (May/June 1998): 2.

⁵ Wayne Overbeck and Thomas M. Pasqua, Jr. *Excellence in College Journalism*. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1983) 227.

⁶ Overbeck and Pasqua 226.

⁷ Allan Wolper, "Tobacco Targets College Students," *Editor & Publisher* 11 Apr. 1998: n. pag., *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 20 May 1999.

⁸ Wolper.

⁹ Stephen Goode, "Are America's College Students Majoring in Booze," *Insight on the News* 10.32 (Aug. 1994): n. pag., *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 25 May 1999.

¹⁰ Debra Erinberg, letter, *New York Times* 17 Jan. 1999, late ed.: A30, *Academic Universe*, online, Lexis-Nexis, 3 Apr. 1999.

¹¹ Wolper.

¹² Wolper.

¹³ Andrew Tellijohn, "College Papers Struggle with Ethics of Alcohol Ads," *Trends* 78.1 (September/October 1998): 3-4

¹⁴ Tellijon 4.

¹⁵ Misty Edgecomb, e-mail to the author, 24 Feb. 1999.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The campus press has achieved an unprecedented level of journalistic freedom. Gone are the days when administrators could exercise *in loco parentis* in their attempts to stifle and control the campus press. Although censorship still occurs in some college newsrooms, the vast majority maintain an independent editorial voice. With this autonomy naturally comes the responsibility to establish and adhere to ethical standards.

The future of the campus press resides in its ability to uphold the journalistic ideals of its predecessors. Student journalists will need to demonstrate their commitment and competence to the campus community. In fulfilling this role, the campus press must serve as forum for enlightened debate as well as reflect the high standards of its educated audience. Student journalists are entitled to the same status, credibility, and opportunity as their professional counterparts but still struggle to live up to them.

Although some challenges remain constant, new ones have emerged. Campuses divided by race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation can isolate the college newspaper from its readers. The college newspaper will have to embrace a culturally and racially diverse student population to remain a voice on campus. This will require newsrooms to consider the impact of news decisions on their multicultural audiences. Campus newspapers must move beyond “political correctness” mandates to an ethical approach that emphasizes mutual respect and understanding.

Another challenge facing the college media is covering the news in an era when crime is daily fare on most campuses. Conflicting federal and state laws as well as administrators can prevent the campus media from alerting student to the potential dangers around them. Colleges and universities responding to the campus crime threat can create problems for student journalists striving to be accurate, fair, and compassionate. The campus media will need to set strict standards to cope with crime coverage.

These challenges require that the campus press develop an ethical approach to decision-making that emphasizes problems in college newsrooms. Student journalists should take the initiative to identify common ethical standards and codify those principles. Although written codes cannot cover all ethical issues, they at least serve as guideposts for inexperienced journalists. Student journalists that participate in the discussion of ethics and codes will benefit when they depart the campus newsroom and enter the professional one.

APPENDIX A

NEWSPAPER SURVEY

The following letter and survey were sent via e-mail to 60 campus newspapers at both private and public schools across the country. As the letter indicates, I had planned to analyze written codes of ethics in college newsrooms. However, the results of the survey revealed the few colleges newspapers had adopted formal codes.

Letter to Student Editor

Dear [Name of Managing Editor or Editor in Chief]:

You make some tough ethical choices. What do you do with advertisements that promote Holocaust revisionism? Do you name the student charged with rape? How far do you push in investigating rumors of misconduct by a professor? How do you deal with pressure from the administration?

Making good ethical decisions is one of the most important parts of your job. Like professional journalists, you face the same fundamental obligations to tell the truth, to treat people with fairness and compassion and to inform readers about issues and actions.

So why is there a tendency among the professional press to disregard student journalists? While books, articles and reports on ethics in the professional setting are numerous, few people seem to care about the campus press.

This is especially true when it comes to tools for ethical decision-making. Journalists and academics have spent a lot time on ethics, in particular, how ethics handbooks articulate the ideals and practices that professional journalists should strive to attain. But little or no attention has been devoted to ethical decision-making in college newsrooms.

As a senior journalism major, I want to change this. My thesis, "College Newsrooms: Analyzing Codes of Ethics," will examine ethics handbooks at campus newspapers to determine their role in ethical decision-making.

I am asking you and other editors across the nation to send a copy of your code of ethics. In addition, I would ask that you answer a few questions about your newspaper.

I hope my thesis will draw some attention to a neglected area of journalism.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call or send e-mail. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanks for your time.

Sincerely,

Holly Sanders

Survey

1. What is the circulation of your newspaper?
2. Is your university private or public?
3. Is your newspaper independent of the university?
4. Do you have an ethics handbook?

Yes:

- a) Is your ethics handbook helpful in making news decisions? Please explain.
- b) Are there areas of your ethics handbook that could be improved? Please explain.

No:

- a) Would your newspaper benefit from an ethics handbook? Please explain.
 - b) Does your newspaper have other help and/or guidelines in making ethical decisions (e.g., newspaper adviser)?
5. Have you had to make a tough ethical decision as editor? If so, please explain the situation and how you resolved it.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE CODES OF ETHICS

Some campus newspapers have adopted written codes of ethics. *The Red & Black*, University of Georgia, and the *Oregon Daily Emerald*, University of Oregon, have implemented codes in their newsrooms. The codes suggest that campus newspapers emphasize a range of ideals.

The Red & Black

Preamble

As an independent student newspaper, The Red & Black strives to provide the most complete and accurate cover possible. By adhering to the following principles, as outline by the Society of Professional Journalists and The Washington Post, we at The Red & Black hope to set a continuing standard for ethical reporting.

1. Seeking the Truth and Reporting Accurately

Accurate Reporting

- Journalists should test the accuracy of information from all course and take care to avoid careless errors. It is never permissible to deliberately distort facts.
- The best effort should be made to seek out subjects of news stories and give them the chance to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Take steps to ensure headlines, cutlines and the like to not conflict with or misrepresent stories
- Staged evens or misleading reenactments should be avoided.
- Surreptitious or undercover reporting methods only should be used when traditional open methods will not yield vital information to the public. If these unusual methods are used, the reader should be informed as such.
- Plagiarism should never be an option.

Fairness and Comprehensive Reporting

- The story of the diversity and importance of the human experience should be told boldly and even when doing so is considered unpopular.

- Journalists should examine their own cultural values and, in doing so, avoid imposing their own values on others.
- They should also avoid stereotyping on the basis of race, gender, age, religion, ethnic background, geography, sexual orientation, disability, social status or even physical appearance.
- The open exchange of viewpoints, even those found repugnant, should be supported.

2. Maintaining Compassion and Minimizing Harm

Compassion and Sensitivity

- The values and concerns of those adversely affected by news coverage should be taken into account, with greater sensitivity taken for children and inexperienced subjects.
- Special care also should be taken when interviewing or photographing those affected by tragedy or grief.
- It should be kept in mind that news reporting does have the potential to cause harm and discomfort, and pursuit of the news is not an excuse for deliberate malicious treatment of a source or subject.
- Caution should be taken in identifying juvenile suspects of victims of sex crimes.

Taste

- Good taste should always be exercised, and pandering to lurid curiosity avoided.
- Vulgar words and profanity should be avoided save for only the most extreme circumstances. The decision to use them should be made only after careful consideration of their relevance to the story.

Balance

- Caution should also be taken in identifying the name of a suspect against whom no charges have been formally filed.
- The rights of a criminal to a fair trial must always be balanced by the right of the public to be informed.

3. Independent Reporting and Conflicts of Interest

Conflicts of Interest

- Any conflict of interest — real or perceived — should be avoided, and associations or activities that could damage integrity or objectivity should be avoided as well.
- If they compromise integrity, gifts and other favors or special treatment should be avoided.

4. Journalistic Accountability

Responding to Readers

- The best efforts should be taken to clarify and explain news coverage, and dialogue with the public should be encouraged.
- The public should not be discouraged against voicing their grievances with the media.

Relations with Colleagues

- Journalists should not be afraid to expose unethical practices by others in their field.
- They also should abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

Dealing with Errors

- Mistakes should be admitted and not concealed.
- Any errors should be publicly corrected in a fair and comprehensive manner.

Oregon Daily Emerald

Free Travel

To remain as free of influence or obligation to report a story, Emerald reporters should not accept free travel, accommodations or meals related to travel. For convenience, sports reporters may travel on team charters, but plans should be made for the Emerald to pay the cost of the transportation and related expenses. The same pay-as-you-go policy applies to non-sports reporting as well, including businesses and governments. Free travel and accommodations that are non-coverage related and that may be proved by a vendor may be accepted if the primary purpose is for education or training and is related to fulfillment of an agreement or contract.

Gifts

Gifts should not be accepted. Any gifts should be returned to the sender or sent to a charity. If the gift is of no significant value, such as a desk trinket, small food item or pen, the staff member may retain the gift.

Free Tickets, Passes or Discounts

If money is available, staffers assigned to cover a sporting event, lecture, play, concert, movie or other entertainment should pay for admission. Free tickets or passes may be accepted by staff members assigned to cover an event or by those attending for

legitimate news purposes. Press facilities at these events may only be used by staff members who are assigned to cover the event. Free tickets or passes may be accepted by staff members for personal use only if tickets are available on the same complimentary bases to non-journalists.

Ownership of Books Records, or Other Products Given for Review

Any materials given to the Oregon Daily Emerald for review become the property of the ODE and not of any individual staff member. They should be returned to the Emerald promptly after the review is written, and standard rules of copyright still apply. Promotional materials, such as stickers, posters and photographs, may be distributed as the editors sees fit.

Other Employment

Other employment must not conflict with the staffer's first responsibilities to the Oregon Daily Emerald. All staffers must report any other employment to the editor-in-chief to avoid any conflicts of interest with assignments or other staff editorial or business responsibilities or influences.

Other Campus Media Work

To avoid a conflict of interest and preserve the integrity of the newsroom, no Emerald employee may work for another campus publication without explicit permission from the editor-in-chief. Generally, permission will be granted only when the type or work done is not normally published in the Emerald (poetry, for instance, is more appropriate for the Oregon Voice than the ODE). This prohibition also extends to public relations media or organizations.

Other Off-Campus Media Work

Approval of work for an off-campus medium and for freelance work should be sought in advance of the commitment. It is permissible only in a noncompetitive medium, on a staffer's own time, and should not conflict with the staffer's obligations to the Emerald.

Membership in College Organizations

Staffers may not cover a campus organization they belong to or participate in any editorial or business decisions regarding that organizations. Staffers may provide story leaders about organization to which they belong to other staffers. Staffers are required to report their memberships to their supervising editor. To maintain the role of the press as

an independent watchdog of government, a staffer may not be an elected or appointed member of student government.

Outside Activities, Including Political

Political involvement, holding public office off-campus and service in community organizations should be considered carefully to avoid compromising personal integrity and that of the publication. The notion of the journalist as an independent observer and fact-finder is important to preserve. A staffer involved in specific political action will not be assigned to cover that involvement. Staffers should conduct their personal lives in a manner that will not lead to conflicts of interest.

Political Buttons, Poster, Etc.

In order to maintain journalistic integrity in the workplace, Emerald staffers should not wear clothing, campaign buttons or other political endorsements while working in the ODE newsroom or while covering a story for the Emerald. Campaign posters, stickers or other political material will not be displayed in the newsroom.

Relationships and Coverage

Staffers must declare conflicts and avoid involvement in stories dealing with members of their families. Staff members must not cover — in words, photographs or artwork — or make news judgments about family members or persons with whom they have financial, adversarial or close relationships.

Use of Alcoholic Beverages While on Assignment

Even though a staffer may be able to drink legally, no drinking in a social setting such as a dinner or reception is allowed. This is to avoid any suspicion by a source or by the public that the staffer's judgment, credibility and/or objectivity is impaired by alcohol. When covering an event where alcohol is served, staffers should not accept free drinks. Staffers should avoid the appearance that they are being "wined and dined" by any source or agency.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is: (verbal) suggestive comments, sexual innuendo, threats, insults, jokes about sex-specific traits, sexual propositions; (non-verbal) vulgar gestures, whistling, leering, and suggestive or insulting noises; (physical) touching, pinching, brushing the body, coercing sexual intercourse, assault; This conduct can be called job-related harassment when submission is made implicitly or explicitly a condition of employment, a condition of work-related assignments, compensation and other factors,

and if such conduct interferes with the staffer's performance or creates a hostile, intimidating or offensive work environment. Sexual harassment is prohibited.

Plagiarism of Words, Art, Other

Plagiarism is prohibited and is illegal if the material is copyright protected. For the purposes of this code, plagiarism is defined as word-for-word duplication of another person's writing and shall be limited to passages that contain distinctively personal thoughts, uniquely stylized phraseology or exclusive facts. A comparable prohibition applies to the use of graphics. Information obtained from a published work must be independently verified before it can be reported as a new, original story. This policy forbids lifting verbatim paragraphs from a wire service without attribution or without pointing out that wire services were used in compiling the story.

Fabrication of Any Kind

The use of composite characters or imaginary situations or characters will not be allowed in news or feature stories. A columnist, may, occasionally, use such an approach in developing a piece, but it must be clear to the reader that the person or situation is fictional.

Electronically Altered Photos

Electronically altering the content of photos for news and general feature stories or as stand-alone news and feature photos is not allowed. Content may be altered as a special effect for a limited number of features if the caption or credit line includes the fact and if an average reader would not mistake the photo for reality. Readers expect photos and stories to be truthful.

Photo Illustration

Set-ups or posed scenes may be used if the average reader will not be misled or if the caption or credit line tells readers that it is a photo illustration.

Use of Photographs of Victims of Accidents, Fires or Natural Disasters

Photos have a tremendous impact on readers. The question of privacy versus the public's right to know should be considered. The line between good and bad taste and reality and sensationalism is not always easy to draw. Care should be taken to maintain the dignity of the subject as much as possible without undermining the truth of the event.

Reporting Names, Addresses of Crime Victims

Staffers need to know the state laws that govern the publication of the names of rape and sexual assault victims. Generally, the names of rape victims are not published; however, there is a trend to ask rape victims to go public. This may be negotiated between the victim and the publication. Victims of non-sexual crimes may be identified but the publication has the responsibility to give some protection to the victim such as giving imprecise addresses. With the exception of major crimes, an arrested person is not named until charges are filed.

Cooperation with Law Enforcement, Government and College Administration

To be an effective watchdog of other agencies, a publication must remain independent. The publication should not take over any of the duties of any outside agency; cooperation or involvement in the work of these agencies should be restricted to what is required by law. Staffers should know any freedom of information, open meeting or shield laws that apply to their work. If a staffer thinks any public authority is interfering with the staffer's functions as a journalist, the incident should be reported to the editor-in-chief.

Scrutiny of a Public Person's Life

Conflicts exist between a person's desire for privacy and the public good or the public's right to know about a public person's life. Persons who freely choose to become public servant should expect a greater level of scrutiny of their life than a private person—even a private person who suddenly is involved in a public situation. Staffers should make judgment based on the real news value of the situation, common sense and decency. Reporters and photographers should not badger a person who has made it clear that he or she does not want to be interviewed or photographed. One exception is those who are involved in a criminal activity or in court. Publishing intimate details of a person's life, such as their health or sexual activities, should be done with extreme care and only if the facts are important for the completeness of the story and reflect in a significant way upon the person's public life.

Profane, Vulgar Words, Explicit Language

The primary audience of a college publication is adults. Profane and vulgar words are a part of everyday conversation, but not generally used for scholarly writing. During the interview stage of news gathering, staffs will encounter interviewees who use words viewed as vulgar and profane. The staff may publish these words if the words are important to the reader's understanding of the situation or if the words help establish the character of the interviewee. The editor may decide to limit references to prevent the

vulgar or obscene language from overshadowing the other, more important facts of the story. Profane or vulgar words are not acceptable for opinion writing.

Sexist Language

Emerald staffers will avoid sexist labels and descriptive language.

Negative Stereotyping

Emerald staffers will take care in writing to avoid applying group stereotypes to individuals who are members of a particular group. Generalizations based upon stereotypes can be misleading and inaccurate. In a broader sense, writers and photographers should avoid more subtle stereotyping in their selection of interviewees and subjects of photographs.

Use of Racial, Ethnic, Other Group Identifiers

Identification of a person as a member of any population group should be limited to those cases when that membership is essential for the reader's complete understanding of the story; it should be done with great care so as not to perpetuate negative group stereotyping.

Granting and Preserving Confidentiality of Sources

A reporter should not promise confidentiality to a source without the permission of the editor-in-chief. Confidentiality should only be given if there is a real danger that physical, emotional or financial harm will come to the source if his or her name were revealed. A reporter should make every attempt to get the same information from another source who agrees to be named since the goal is to attribute all information to a specific source for all stories.

Corrections

An inaccuracy is never knowingly published. If any error is found, the Oregon Daily Emerald is obligated to correct the error as soon as possible regardless of the source of the error.

Ownership of Work

The Oregon Daily Emerald "owns" the published and unpublished work done by a staffer if the work was done as a staff assignment or, in the case of photography, was done using Emerald equipment. Ownership of unpublished work may revert to the staffer at a certain time if the editor-in-chief agrees to this arrangement. The Emerald has unlimited use of the work.

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