

# College Media Advisers Code of Ethical Behavior

The adviser is a journalist, educator and manager who is, above all, a role model. Because of this, the adviser must be beyond reproach with regard to personal and professional ethical behavior; should encourage the student media advised to formulate, adhere to and publicize an organizational code of ethics; and ensure that neither the medium, its staff nor the adviser enter into situations which would jeopardize the public's trust in and reliance on the medium as a fair and balanced source of news and analysis.

## **The Adviser's Professional Code**

Freedom of expression and debate by means of a free and vigorous student media are essential to the effectiveness of an educational community in a democratic society. This implies the obligation of the student media to provide a forum for the expression of opinion - not only those opinions differing from established university or administrative policy, but those at odds with media staff beliefs or opinions as well.

Student media must be free from all forms of external interference designed to regulate content, including confiscation of products or broadcasts; suspension of publication or transmission; academic, personal or budgetary sanctions; arbitrary removal of staff members or faculty; or threats to the existence of student publications or broadcast outlets. In public institutions, the law is quite clear on guaranteeing broad freedom of expression to students. In private institutions, media advisers should aid in developing governing documents and working with administrative guidelines which foster a free and open atmosphere for students involved in campus media work, if such freedoms do not currently exist.

Students should be made mindful of their obligation to avoid real and apparent conflicts of interest. They must be held to clear local policies in that regard.

Advisers, in addition to adhering to their own code of ethics, should encourage the media they advise to establish and publish codes that apply to student staffs and conform to nationally established and accepted journalistic norms regarding professional behavior, conflict of interest, acceptance of gifts and services, honesty and integrity.

Advisers, in these roles as professionals, must ensure that they have or gain the skills and education requisite to teach all aspects of the media they advise.

## **The Adviser's Personal Code**

The ultimate goal of the student media adviser is to mold, preserve and protect an ethical and educational environment in which excellent communication skills and sound journalistic practice will be learned and practiced by students. There should never be an instance where an adviser maximizes quality by minimizing learning. Student media should always consist of student work.

Faculty, staff and other non-students who assume advisory roles with student media must remain aware of their obligation to defend and teach without censoring, editing, directing or producing. It should not be the media adviser's role to modify student writing or broadcasts, for it robs student journalists of educational opportunity and could severely damage their rights to free expression.

Advisers to student media must demonstrate a firm dedication to accuracy, fairness, facts and honesty in all content of the medium.

Since there is no clear line between student media content and student media operations, ethical prohibitions against interference in content also apply to interference in student media operations in areas such as story assignments, decisions on inclusion or exclusion of content, staff selection, source selection, news and advertising acceptability standards, and most budgetary decisions. Using arbitrary policies, production guidelines or financial constraints to limit student decision-making is no more ethical than rewriting or changing editorial content or influencing the physical appearance of media.

Advisers should be keenly aware of the potential for conflict of interest between their teaching/advising duties and their roles as university staff members and private citizens. It is vital that they avoid not only actual but apparent conflicts of interest. The promotional/publicity interests of the university and the news goals of the student media are often incompatible. Advisers should also beware of becoming the publicity focus of organizations to which they belong or for activities in which they are participating.

Advisers cannot expect student staff to respect their own ethical guidelines if advisers believe themselves exempt from strict ethical behavior. The requirements for ethical behavior extend to all operations of the student media, not just the news or information function.

Perceptions of favoritism in the purchasing of services and equipment or granting of contracts can be just as damaging to credibility as perceived favoritism in news judgment. This is particularly true when offers of unrelated equipment or services are made in return for giving business to vendors. A clear policy which applies to all members or the student media operation should be communicated to all potential vendors.

### **The Adviser's Obligations**

Membership in College Media Advisers, Inc. signifies acceptance of this code and a willingness to abide by its tenets.

The organization will support those members who adhere to this code and thereby become victims of pressure or negative action from university administrations. This may involve formal censure of the offending individual and/or institution of higher education.

*Approved, March 9, 2000  
SCC Board of Directors*