

Fairfax High School
School Newspaper Editorial and Ethics Policies
2007 - 2008

I. General Purposes, Mission Policies

The purpose of the school newspaper is to inform and entertain our audience, which includes the student body, faculty, the local community, and other schools' journalism programs, on subjects that may affect readers. The newspaper also aims to be a forum for the voices of the audience to be heard. Finally, the newspaper serves as a hands-on learning tool for the staff as they have the responsibility of putting out this information in a clear, meaningful and journalistic way.

The decision-making process of content in the newspaper is left up to the student staff with the help of the adviser. Although the staff is open to talking with the administration about story ideas, the final consent of the decision-making process lies with the duly appointed editor-in-chief and the appointed editorial board.

The editorial board is the decision-making group for the newspaper staff. It includes the editor-in-chief, business/advertising editors, photography editor and section editors, but attendance to the meetings is open to all staff members and members of the administration. Meetings will be twice a month, but the adviser or the editor-in-chief can also call them if there are special needs. The board is in charge of making the decisions on what will go into the newspaper, and a majority vote determines those decisions. The adviser is there not to vote, but to help give comments and concerns to the staff members prior to the voting. If a controversial issue arises, it will be voted on in the same manner, but it is the common assumption that there will be nothing published in the newspaper that is libelous, obscene to minors, advocates illegal activities, is copyrighted, or may cause substantial disruption to the school.

II. Publishing

The Colonial Gazette is published by Fairfax High School, a public institution. Student journalists are responsible for providing original content for both the newspaper and the online version. The school provides almost no funding so it is up to the staff's to raise money for productions through the sale of advertising, subscriptions and funding-raising events.

III. Advertising

The Colonial Gazette reserves the right to refuse advertising that the staff determines is false or misleading to the student body. No ads will be printed that promote products or services that do not meet community standards for good taste or that are illegal to the majority of the student audience. Advertisements that appear in the publication are not necessarily endorsed by the publication.

IV. News

The Colonial Gazette is committed to balanced and impartial news coverage. The reporters attempt to represent all the sides of issues, even if they are controversial, in a fair, honest manner, avoiding exploitation and sensationalism. Emphasis is on issues related to school, district and local issues, but state, national and international topics may be covered, if appropriate, and with a local angle.

VI. Editorials and Opinions

The Colonial Gazette provides a public forum for free speech for students, staff members and others in the school community to voice opinions and concerns. The Constitutional right of free speech includes both the freedom and responsibility to discuss, question, challenge the institution, and the right to express unpopular opinions. An editorial will appear in each issue on the opinion page, and the editor-in-chief will write the article or assign the writer for the staff editorial. The discussion of the content will be by the editorial board, and those who do not agree may write dissenting staff opinions if appropriate. The staff editorial will not be bylined, but all other articles in the newspaper will be as well as photographs, photo illustrations, and artwork. The stance of editorials requires the consensus of the editorial board. Opinion pieces by the individuals identify the author.

VII. Letters to the Editor

The newspaper staff welcomes letters from students, faculty, and community members as they give a constructive way for more people to express their opinions, criticisms, and reactions to school issues. The writer must sign the letter, and editors will make either personal or email contact before publishing to confirm that the name given is valid. If a letter has more than two people represented in the writing, there will be a main author credited with a byline for the supporters, but all must sign the letter before publishing with verifications. The letters must be 250 words or less, and can be edited for grammar and content if necessary by the staff as long as the changes do not affect the meaning of the letter. Each writer will be contacted to make sure of this before publication. Due to limitations of space, the staff cannot guaranteed that all letters to be published, but the staff will do its best to cover all topics fully.

The letters to the editors can be placed in the adviser's mailbox in the main office, or they can be sent to the email address provided in the newspaper each issue.

VIII. Limitations

The Colonial Gazette will not print material that is libelous, obscene, indecent, profane, invades privacy, or disrupts the school process.

Libel is defined as a) a false publication in writing, printing, or typewriting, or in signs or pictures that maliciously damage a person's reputation. b) the act of presenting such a statement to the public.

The Supreme Court has established that, to be **obscene**, material must meet a three-pronged test: (1) An average person, applying contemporary community standards, must find that the material, as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest; (2) The material must depict or describe, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by applicable law; and (3) The material, taken as a whole, must lack serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

The FCC has defined **profanity** as "including language so grossly offensive to members of the public who actually hear it as to amount to a nuisance."

The FCC has defined broadcast **indecentcy** as "language or material that, in context, depicts or describes, in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards for the broadcast medium, sexual or excretory organs or activities." Indecent programming contains patently offensive sexual or excretory material that does not rise to the level of obscenity. The courts have held that indecent material is protected by the First Amendment and cannot be banned entirely. It may, however, be restricted in order to avoid its broadcast during times of the day when there is a reasonable risk that children may be in the audience.

Invasion of privacy deals with the individual's right to protect him/herself against the improper use of his/her name in the media. Those who become involved in public events do not easily retain the right to privacy. The Colonial Gazette will exercise care not to place an individual in a false position.

Disruption of the school process means the deliberate advocacy of interfering with the regular events of school. The Colonial Gazette will not publish material which, taken as a whole, only appeals to interest in sex, and lacks serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value.

Sources used: <http://www.journalism.indiana.edu/resources/scholastic/editorial2.html>
<http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/obscene.html>