



**Carleton**  
UNIVERSITY

# **Ethics and Professional Standards for the School of Journalism and Communication**

**Updated August 2018**

***Students should read sections of the Carleton University calendars dealing with educational equity, accommodation policies and instructional offences.***

***Appended to this document is the Carleton University Statement on Conduct and Human Rights.***

***What follows is a statement of ethical policy and practice. Adherence to it will be one of the measures upon which a journalism student's work and performance may be evaluated. Deviations must first be discussed with an instructor.***

## Fundamental Principles

- In a democracy, **all** people must be encouraged to exert influence and be involved.
- A free society offers choices. Information and understanding are essential for meaningful participation and informed decision-making.
- The role of journalism and of the journalist is to collect and disseminate information and opinion in order to foster understanding, so that people may enjoy the rights and discharge the responsibilities of full citizenship.
- The public trust implicit in journalism calls for a high degree of independence and impartiality. This public trust is not a right. It is a privilege to be earned and sustained through daily practice. Never compromise your independence. The journalist's mandate calls for the highest degree of ethical behaviour, professionalism and judgment.

## Guidelines

1. Be honest with the audience and sources.
2. Be accurate and reliable.
3. Be fair. When reports contain opinions, and other opinions are probable, those other opinions should be sought out and presented.

## Sources

1. Journalists constantly have to balance the individual's right to privacy against the public's need for information. Where an individual's need for privacy is an issue, **do** weigh it against the value of the information to the audience. If the weight is clearly on the side of the individual or the audience, the decision is easy. When the balance seems even, the journalist's first obligation is to the audience. If in doubt, consult your instructor.
2. **Do** identify yourself as a journalist. On investigative assignments, if doing so is likely to result in the withholding of information essential to the story, exceptions may be made with the approval of the instructor.
3. Keep professional promises to sources who have been honest with you.
4. **Don't** solicit or accept information from sources on the understanding that you are a student and it will not be published. That's not journalism. Identify yourself as student, but state that, if at all possible, you hope to publish the article.
5. **Don't** solicit or accept information on the undertaking that the source will have any right of approval or control over what is written or broadcast, or the right to see or hear, in advance, what will be published or broadcast.

6. **Do** inform interviewees about the general subject matter and explain what may be done with their answers. **Don't** provide a list of questions in advance, either for information or approval, without the approval of the instructor. In such a case, do make it clear that you will not be limited in the interview to the questions on the list.
7. **Don't** pay sources or give gifts or favours to sources, or accept special treatment, money, favours or gifts of value from sources. Use your common sense. A cup of coffee is not a bribe. But a free trip, lavish entertainment or a bottle of liquor may be seen as one. Not only should you not be bought, but you should not be seen as having been bought.
8. Unless approved by your instructor, **don't** tape or videotape a source for broadcast without first having explained that you will do so.
9. Reporting without direct attribution is sometimes essential to go beyond the apparent and superficial in covering public affairs. **Do**, however, identify sources and attribute information as a general rule. Journalists making a commitment of confidentiality should be aware that, in law, they have no legal privilege with sources and may be convicted of contempt of court, a criminal offence, for honouring their commitment.
10. **Do** confirm with sources exactly what is meant when they provide information on the understanding that it is "off the record," "background" or "not for attribution." **Do** ask if "off the record" information may be used to get it on the record.
11. Many people are not accustomed to dealing with the media, to the point of being naive and extremely vulnerable. In many cases, they find themselves "in the news" through no actions of their own. **Don't** take advantage of such naiveté or vulnerability, or manipulate such a person.
12. **Do** quote sources precisely, and fairly reflect the context of conversations. While some instructors may impose a stricter standard, there may be no harm in altering a quote to:
  - correct grammar that could make the statement confusing or make the speaker appear foolish.
  - avoid dialect that is not essential to the story.
13. **Don't** fabricate or plagiarize. (This includes faking on-location actuality sound, film/video or photographs; or fabricating sound bytes, or clips, in any way.) Both may result in disciplinary action.<sup>1</sup> Faculty members must report to the Journalism Program Head, as quickly as possible, allegations of fabrication or plagiarism.
14. Second-hand information, beyond that which is general background and uncontroversial, must be checked independently. The basic principle: Do your own research.
15. If erroneous information is disseminated, **do** admit and correct the error(s) as soon as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> See Undergraduate Calendar section 12.0 Academic Integrity <http://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/> or General Regulations, Section 19, of the Graduate Calendar <http://calendar.carleton.ca/grad/gradregulations/>

16. Opinion, interpretative or analytical pieces should be clearly labelled in a way that is easily understood by the audience.
17. Offensive language, including profanity and insulting comment, should be included only when clearly relevant to the story.

## **Conflict of Interest**

1. **Do** avoid direct conflicts of interest and be aware that the appearance of conflict should also be considered.
2. **Don't** interview your friends or family unless you make the relationship clear to the audience. Always check with your course instructor first. Where, because of personal or family relationships, your objectivity or impartiality may be called into question, **don't** undertake a reporting or editing assignment. The integrity of the journalist-source relationship varies inversely with their personal closeness.
3. Journalists should not be denied the rights of citizenship, but exercising these rights in a partisan way may conflict with journalistic integrity. The journalist is disqualified from writing or editing news about matters in which he/she is specifically involved.
4. **Don't** abuse your journalistic role for personal benefit or gain or for the benefit or gain of a family member, friend or acquaintance.

## **Unpublishing**

The Journalism program aims to publish all student work that meets the requirements of accurate and high quality journalism. Our School publications are part of the public record, and generally do not “unpublish” any stories, segments of stories, or names of sources. Exceptions due to legal or source safety issues will be considered by the Program Head and the publishers of the School publication in question.

## **Social Media Use: Caution**

Social media have important journalistic roles as reporting tools for breaking news, covering live events, and promoting published content. They have also become active arenas for discussion and debate on all topics imaginable. Both are valid uses, but the ways people doing journalistic work use social media for personal expression can affect how they (and the teams or publications with whom they work) are viewed by those they cover, by sources they contact, by audiences, and by potential employers.

Comments and opinions expressed on social media may be seen as showing bias on issues or as reflecting poorly on a journalist's character if they seem harsh, flippant, one-sided, partisan, profane or immature. Remember that social media have a long memory, and those seeking to know more about a journalist or other communications professional will have access to posts, tweets, retweets, follows and favourites stretching back years.

Everything that is said on open social media is being said in public to the world. Those who want to be viewed as professional and fair must manage their use of social media carefully, so as not to appear otherwise. It is also crucial to remember that statements made on social media are subject to the same defamation laws that govern traditional media.

## **Carleton University Statement on Conduct and Human Rights**

1. Carleton University is a community of faculty, staff, students and associated professionals who are engaged in and/or support teaching, learning and research within an environment of education, work and living. The University's members, as part of the community at large, are governed by the law common to all persons.

2. Membership in the University community entails certain rights and responsibilities, including an obligation to deal ethically and fairly with other members and to not discriminate or harass. The University requires civil conduct and respect for the rights of others. It endeavours to provide a safe environment, conducive to personal and intellectual growth, which is not only free of discrimination, injustice and violence but is also characterized by understanding, respect, peace, trust, openness and fairness.

3. We believe that universities have a mandate to foster the pursuit of knowledge and, as our founder, Henry Marshall Tory, said, "the trained intelligence of a nation is its greatest asset, greater than any material resource." A central part of the University's mission is to advance knowledge and scholarship, providing people who have the ability and desire to learn with opportunities to realize their intellectual potential.

4. The University's fundamental commitment to scholarship encourages its members to perform to the highest standards of academic excellence. The University upholds its members' academic freedom so they can carry out their scholarly work without threat of interference.

4.1 Academic freedom is the freedom to examine, question, teach and learn. It involves the right to investigate, speculate and comment without reference to prescribed doctrine, as well as the right to criticize the University and society at large. Academic freedom carries with it the duty to use that freedom in a manner consistent with ethical guidelines and human rights law, and the scholarly obligation to base research and teaching on an honest search for knowledge. It may also be circumscribed by civil and criminal law.

4.2 The frank discussion of controversial ideas, the examination of various or competing perspectives, the pursuit and publication of controversial research, and the study and teaching of material with controversial and even offensive content in the context of conscientious, professional instruction in the University are protected within academic freedom.

(The full policy can be found in the Equity Services section of the University's website. Please also refer to the Offences of Conduct section of the current Carleton University Calendars.)