



# Ferris State *Torch*



## Policy Manual

*Torch*

Policies and Procedures  
Revised Summer 2016

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## About the *Torch*

The *Torch* is published every Tuesday when school is in session, and the website, [fsutorch.com](http://fsutorch.com), is updated as needed throughout the year. The *Torch* is produced entirely by students. It has served as a primary source of information for the Ferris State University community since 1931. The main goals of the *Torch* are to report accurately, honestly and fairly on the university and its people and to provide an informative, entertaining and lively exchange of ideas for students, faculty and staff.

The editorial, production, and business offices of the *Torch* are located in rooms 011 and 013 in the Alumni Building.

The *Torch* funding model was altered in 2014, moving away from reliance on advertising revenue for operating funds. The *Torch* entered an agreement with the Pioneer Group at that time to handle all advertising. In exchange, the *Torch* receives print and distribution services from the Pioneer Group. The *Torch* receives additional operational costs from the university, with support from the President, Academic Affairs, and the College of Arts & Sciences. The *Torch* is distributed free to students, faculty, staff, visitors, and community members both on and off campus. The web site is free to access. Print copies can be found in most campus buildings and in numerous communication locations each week.

## *Torch* References

### Phone

Editor-in-Chief.....	(231) 591-5978
Adviser.....	(231) 591-2529
Department of Languages and Literature.....	(231) 591-3988

### *Torch* Address

The Ferris State *Torch*  
410 Oak St.  
Alumni Building 113  
Ferris State University  
Big Rapids, MI 49307

### *Torch* E-mail Addresses

Editor-in-Chief:  
[fsutorcheditor@ferris.edu](mailto:fsutorcheditor@ferris.edu)

Adviser:  
[StevenFox@ferris.edu](mailto:StevenFox@ferris.edu)



## **Staff Roles and Responsibilities**

### **All Staff Members**

All staff members of the *Torch* are to represent the newspaper in a professional and enthusiastic manner. *Torch* staff members and editorial staff are free to participate with, or in, registered student organizations or other student employment on campus as long as there is no conflict of interest (see the ethics policy on pg. 6) or conflicting work hours.

All staff members are welcome and encouraged to generate story and editorial ideas. They also are encouraged to write and submit columns and opinions.

### **Editor-in-Chief**

The editor-in-chief is the chief executive officer of the *Torch* and directs all of the paper's editorial and production activities. The editor-in-chief sets editorial guidelines, determines the editorial scope of the paper, and works to assure quality and consistency. The editor-in-chief also oversees the role and behavior of all employees in all aspects of the *Torch's* operation.

As the voice of the student newspaper, the editor-in-chief is ultimately responsible for the direction and growth of the *Torch*. All content decisions are made by *Torch* student staff members with final approval from the editor-in-chief.

### **Section, Multimedia, and Copy Editors**

The four main sections of the newspaper - News, Lifestyles, Sports, and Opinions - each have an editor responsible for the content and staff of their respective sections. A section editor's job is to supervise and manage the writing staff by being as up-to-date as possible with news, events, and happenings, either directly or indirectly related to the FSU community. Copy editors responsible for the proofing, editing, and fact checking of all copy. The *Torch* also employs a multimedia editor in charge of organizing photographers, photo art for all sections, and video for special stories. Overlapping duties among editors include:

- Section and multimedia editors seek and assign stories, beats, and photo art, and they assist production staff with format and design of assigned sections.
- Section and copy editors review, edit, proof, and fact check stories, and they are responsible for all copy according to AP and *Torch* style guidelines.
- Section, multimedia, and copy editors are expected to regularly attend staff and production meetings.

## **Production Staff**

The production staff is comprised of a production manager and a production assistant who work with the editor-in-chief and editorial staff to produce an aesthetically pleasing newspaper using a variety of computer programs to pull together stories, headlines, artwork, graphics, and ads to go into the paper each week.

## **Staff Reporters**

Staff reporters are writers and photographers charged with generating story ideas and reporting on news, entertainment, feature, or sports stories assigned by their respective section editors.

Staff writers are responsible for providing breaking, generated, or assigned stories by the regular weekly deadline. They may be assigned a regular beat by their section editor. Staff writers also are responsible for improving the quality and content of copy they produce as directed by editorial staff.

Staff photographers are managed by the multimedia editor and may be assigned to produce art for section stories, stand-alone art, or photo galleries. Staff photographers are welcome and encouraged to write and give their input on editorial content.

## **Cartoonists**

Cartoonists are artists on staff who contribute original art to the newspaper by the weekly deadline. Cartoons and art are published at the discretion of the editor-in-chief.

## **Distribution**

Distribution is handled by a student staff member to the *Torch* who reports directly to the adviser. Newspapers are delivered every Tuesday by the Pioneer group to the Alumni Building loading area. Every week before Wednesday afternoon, the distribution staff member replaces old newspapers with new ones in newsstands and various strategic placement locations on the FSU Big Rapids campus. Old newspapers are counted from each location for distribution purposes and discarded into FSU provided recycling bins. The distribution staff member collaborates with the editor-in-chief and adviser regarding distribution routes, placement of newsstands on campus, and any other issues affecting distribution of the newspaper.



## **Interim Staff**

Interim staff members may fill various positions at the *Torch* on a non-paid basis in an effort to gauge their employability.

## **Professionalism and Behavior Policies**

### **Prior Review of Stories**

It is against *Torch* policy to allow a source to review a story before it appears in print. If a source asks to see a story before it is printed, it is the duty of the staff member to remind the source, politely but firmly, that prior review of copy is against *Torch* policy.

This policy appears first because it is a particularly important policy for a university newspaper. Prior review can become prior approval, and even when it does not, it still has the potential to affect coverage of important and controversial issues.

The student members of the *Torch* staff are the only people who determine the editorial content of the newspaper, and attempts by anyone else to influence content must be resisted.

### **Sensitive or Controversial Material**

The editor-in-chief, after possible consultation with the adviser and involved staff members, will make the final decision on sensitive or controversial matters as related to newspaper content, staff discrepancies, and other responsibilities paramount to the successful continuation of the *Torch*. The editor-in-chief will take care to avoid libel or obscenity in the print and online publications, and may consult with the student adviser to determine if the material falls into one of these categories. Ultimately, the final decision belongs to the editor-in-chief.

All comments, concerns, complaints, or suggestions *Torch* readers express must be referred directly to the editor-in-chief. If a reader expresses those views to any other member of the staff, the staff member shall remain polite and refer all comments to the editor-in-chief without posing comments of their own, as they may not represent the best interest of the *Torch*.

## **Ethics**

*Torch* staff members are expected to live up to the ethical standards of the journalism profession. The Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics is included in **Appendix A** to be used as a guide. The editor-in-chief and adviser may also be consulted in answering questions of ethical conduct and in cases re-

quiring extra attention.

## **Professionalism**

*Torch* staff members in all roles are expected to perform their duties in a professional manner. Staff members shall be polite and on time to interviews. Attire should be appropriate for the situation, varying from informal to business casual to formal. When a section editor directs a writer to cover an event, the writer will be provided with a *Torch* identification tag so they can easily be identified as a member of the press.

Staff members also are expected to be professional in the office and to be on time for staff meetings. Friends are not permitted in the office on production days, nor to simply "hang out" while staff members perform their work.

## **Deadlines**

*Torch* staff members are expected to turn in their assignments by deadline as determined by individual section editors and the editor-in-chief, as advertisers purchase space in the paper and expect it to be distributed every Wednesday.

The content deadline is every Friday before midnight during regular production weeks. Exceptions to this deadline may include Lifestyles or Sports events occurring over the weekend, breaking news, or accommodating special circumstances to follow a developing or complex story with section editor and editor-in-chief approval. Section editors are responsible for planning ahead and assigning articles by noon every Monday the week prior to the next publication date.

Late stories affect numerous people in the production chain. Each late story affects *Torch* production and editorial staff, taking away from valuable time they need to complete their personal studies.

Any questions on deadline, editorial, or production procedures are to be directed toward the editor-in-chief. A full production schedule will be made available to all *Torch* employees.

## **Vulgar or Obscene Language**

The *Torch* follows the guidelines in the Associated Press Stylebook under the entry "obscenities, profanities, vulgarities." Individual cases will be judged by the editor-in-chief.

## **Anonymous Sources and Off-the-Record Interviews**

Reporters shall avoid using anonymous sources except in rare cases.



In all cases, the editor-in-chief must be notified of the name of the anonymous source. The decision and responsibility whether or not to identify a source lies with the editor-in-chief, not with the reporter, and reporters should make that fact clear to potential sources. Any story that does use an anonymous source must include the reason the source was not named. Anonymous sources should not be used without corroboration.

*Torch* reporters shall never agree to an off-the-record interview unless the editor-in-chief has been informed and agrees to the terms of the interview. Reporters should tell potential sources who request off-the-record status that granting such requests is against *Torch* policy. If a source gives a reporter information anyway, all information can be used freely.

### **Identifying Race or Sexual Orientation**

Individuals shall not be identified by race unless they are suspected of a crime and the reporter is providing identifying information to help aid police in their capture.

Along the same line, a person's sexual orientation is seldom pertinent information. Unless a story specifically calls for a person's sexual orientation to be identified, refrain from using it as an identifier.

### **Editorializing**

Editorializing is the placing of opinions where they don't belong - in news, entertainment, feature, and sports stories. Editorial comments are to be saved for Opinions section pages or columns only. Stories shall always be balanced and unbiased.

Reporters may express their personal opinions in columns or opinion pieces, to their section editors, the editor-in-chief, or among themselves.

To avoid adding personal opinions, always state the source of any information included in your articles (this also helps avoid plagiarism). In addition, reporters should avoid "wrapping-up" an article's ending by making judgments on an event's repercussions.

### **Letters to the Editor**

All letters to the newspaper should be typed, double-spaced, and signed with a verifiable signature. A clear means of identifying the author of the letter is mandatory. Letters should not exceed 300 words, and the *Torch* reserves the right to edit for clarity and length. Anonymous or unsigned letters will not be printed.

The *Torch* reserves the right to print representative letters on issues, rather than every letter received. The *Torch* will not print letters containing personal

attacks, libelous or malicious statements, or fictitious names. The *Torch* also reserves the right to limit the number of responses on an issue.

The Opinions editor and editor-in-chief shall verify each letter's origin and ensure that each letter was written by the person said to have authored it.

### **Column Content**

It is the *Torch's* policy to treat everyone fairly and equally. Columns which breed hatred, stereotype any groups, or which suggest any section of the population is inferior to others, will not be printed.

Pieces by individual columnists do not necessarily reflect the opinion of *Torch* staff as a whole. Because the newspaper values diversity of thought and wants to make its opinion pages a place for intelligent, enlightened debate about issues currently affecting the FSU community, the editorial staff encourages the publication of diverse and thought-provoking columns and issues.

### **Advertising**

The *Torch* no longer employs business staff to handle the sale and placement of ads in the newspaper. The Pioneer Group located in Big Rapids now handles all advertisement sales and placement.

No *Torch* staff member shall accept any ad copy or payment for ads. Accepting any payment may be grounds for termination of employment.

All ad inquiries are to be referred to Danette Doyle, display advertising manager at the Pioneer Group, at (231) 592-8359, or [ddoyle@pioneergroup.com](mailto:ddoyle@pioneergroup.com).

### **Release of Information**

Outside sources and other media outlets may sometimes contact the *Torch* for information. It is important the information released is appropriate, fair, and accurate. All requested content must be approved by the editor-in-chief before any information is released. The editor-in-chief shall document the circumstances and nature of the requested information release, and must be sure the released information is correct.

### **Office Policies**

- There is no smoking or using tobacco products in the *Torch* offices.
- People who are not *Torch* staff members are not permitted to use the offices, phones, computers, printers, or any other *Torch* equipment.
- Keep friends and visitors to a minimum. Staff are responsible for the behavior of their guests.



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- Language - both content and volume - should be appropriate for the business setting.
- *Torch* computers, equipment, and other office supplies are to be treated with respect at all times.
- *Torch* staff are permitted to do homework on the office computers when not on duty. All homework documents must be saved to private storage devices, and not on any *Torch* computer's hard drive.
- *Torch* work takes priority over homework on office computers. If all of the computers are full, those doing non-*Torch* work will have to wait.
- The production computers are for production only - no exceptions. If any files other than those related to the *Torch* are discovered on these computers, the staff member may face reprimands up to termination of employment.
- All office supplies, software, reference books, cameras, and lenses are not to be taken from the *Torch* office except for appropriate *Torch* business.

### Visitors

Professionalism is the rule. When visitors come to the office, a staff member should greet them and ask how they can be helped. If they ask to speak to a specific editor or reporter who isn't present, the greeting staff member should get their contact information and a short message.

If the visitors have questions about advertising, staff members should inform them the Pioneer Group handles all advertising for the *Torch* and refer them to the Pioneer Group contact (see the advertising policy on pg. 9).

If someone comes in who seems angry, staff members present are to remain calm. If a section editor or the editor-in-chief is present, they shall be the staff member to make contact. If a section editor or the editor-in-chief is not in the office, the staff member making contact is to seek to understand the problem and take accurate notes. During the encounter, the staff member is to inform the person notes are being taken to ensure the issue is properly addressed. The staff member, after the person has left, is to refer the problem and notes to the editor-in-chief or adviser.

It is not the responsibility of any staff member to take the abuse of an angry reader; however, staff members are to remain professional and attempt to diffuse the situation as much as possible.

Threats are never acceptable behavior, and if any staff member is threatened, contact FSU Department of Public Safety at (231) 591-5000.

### Equal Opportunity Employment

It is the obligation of the *Torch* to comply with all applicable equal opportunity employment laws and regulations. Students interested in editorial,



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production, or distribution positions will be considered for employment without regard to race, creed, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability, economic status, or sexual orientation.

All *Torch* employees must be enrolled in at least six credit hours at Ferris State University to remain employed in their hired position. Summer employees must be enrolled in at least credit hours for the fall semester and participate in the work-study program.

### **Grounds for Termination From Employment**

- Theft or misuse of *Torch* equipment.
- Violation of the university's drug use or sexual harassment policies.
- Malicious libel, invasion of privacy, or fabrication.
- Plagiarism violating the Fair Use Doctrine (see the section about plagiarism and fair use on pg. 17).
- Failure to:
  - Meet deadlines on three separate occasions.
  - Attend required staff meetings on three separate occasions without prior notification to the editor-in-chief.
  - Abide by all stipulations according to the *Torch* contract.

### **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment includes but is not limited to: unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, sexually motivated physical contact, and any form of sexist communication including photos, posters, drawings, etc. Sexist comments and sexual harassment will not be tolerated at the *Torch* and could result in immediate termination of employment.

Any *Torch* staff member who believes he or she is the target of sexual harassment is to take immediate action to ensure the harassment stops. Action steps include telling the offending staff member their comments and behavior must stop immediately. If the offending staff member continues, additional action may be taken by contacting the following:

- *Torch* adviser (231) 591-2529.
- Affirmative Action Office at (231) 591-3843.
- Office of Student Conduct at (231) 591-3619.

### **Alcohol and Drug Use**

At no time should a *Torch* staff member enter the office under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Any staff member who conducts *Torch* business under the influence of alcohol or drugs will be terminated. All employees are required



to read and sign the drug-free workplace agreement according to Ferris State University policy.

## **Telephone Use**

### **Office Phone Use**

The office phones are for *Torch* business only, such as conducting phone interviews. Other uses are not permitted unless there is an emergency.

*Torch* staff members shall not give out *Torch* phone numbers as their own personal phone number.

### **Messages**

Phone messages are particularly important for reporters, so proper phone etiquette must be used by all staff members. When an office phone rings, a staff member should answer the phone promptly and as follows: "Thank you for calling the Ferris State *Torch*. This is (staff member's name). How may I help you?" If the caller wants to speak with another staff member who isn't in the office, then the answering staff member shall take a complete and detailed message.

When taking a message, staff members should include the following information: the caller's name, title, and phone number; date and time of call; a specific and detailed message; and sign with their name or initials. The staff member who took the message is to then place it in the mailbox of the recipient.

If a caller is inquiring about advertising in the *Torch*, refer to the advertising policy on Page 9.

### **Private Phone Numbers**

The *Torch* provides a phone list containing the private phone numbers of all editors and other staff members at the beginning of each semester. Staff members are not to give out the private phone numbers of other staff members unless the recipient is another *Torch* staff member. Callers may phone in to complain about an article or column and request to talk with the reporter or editor involved. Again, staff members should take a detailed message from the caller, but are not to give out the private number of any *Torch* staff member.

## **General Knowledge**

The office and newsroom of the *Torch* are located in rooms 011 and 013 of the Alumni Building. Production is located in 011, joining the main office.



The editor-in-chief, adviser, section/multimedia/copy editors, production and distribution staff members have keys to the offices. The last staff member with a key to leave the office or newsroom is responsible for locking the office and newsroom doors, and should make sure all equipment is properly shut down and turn the lights off.

The main office and production room should never be left unlocked when unattended. If a staff member finds the room unattended and the door unlocked, they are to call the editor-in-chief, adviser, production manager or a section editor to come lock the door.

With the exception of production times, the *Torch* operates during normal university business hours; however, the *Torch* office is not regularly staffed throughout the day. Under no circumstances are staff members allowed to stay beyond building hours without prior consultation with the editor-in-chief or adviser.

### **More About Keys**

For security reasons, only select members of the staff are issued keys to the *Torch* office and newsroom. Under no circumstances are those staff members who have been issued keys to pass their key to another staff member. Those staff members who have been issued keys are required to return the key to the adviser or the FSU Physical Plant office immediately after their employment ends with the *Torch*. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action from Ferris State University. Lost keys are to be reported immediately to the adviser and FSU Physical Plant office.

### **Personal Belongings**

Staff members are responsible for their personal belongings they bring to the *Torch* office and newsroom. The *Torch* takes no responsibility for lost or stolen items.

### **Cleanliness**

It is the responsibility of all staff members to keep the office, production room, and newsroom clean, and to not let their personal belongings accumulate in the office area.

Food and drinks are allowed in the office and newsroom. While drinks may be consumed at desks, food must be eaten at the meeting table and garbage disposed of immediately afterward. No drinks may be left on the desks. Staff members who damage *Torch* equipment by spilling their food or drinks will be responsible for cleaning and replacement fees.

### Getting Paid

FSU issues paychecks every other Friday. In order for staff members to get paid, they must first have all of their employment paperwork completed with the Languages and Literature Office (ASC 3080).

All staff members are paid a fixed hourly rate per week determined by their position at the *Torch*.

### Online Content

*Torch* web content is subject to the same standards and regulations as print content including professionalism, ethics, and vulgarities. The related section editor and editor-in-chief are responsible for upholding these standards for web stories. Section editors may also be responsible for live updates during breaking news and events on campus. These updates may be direct to the *Torch* website, and through the *Torch's* social media accounts on Facebook ([facebook.com/fsutorch](https://www.facebook.com/fsutorch)) and Twitter (@FSUTORCH).

The *Torch* web page editor is responsible for posting stories to the website and on Facebook and Twitter throughout the week as needed. This duty is to be performed near the beginning of peak web traffic on a daily basis. Special content published online, such as for the Satire or Entertainment sections, are at the discretion and direction of the editor-in-chief.

### Mailboxes

All staff members will be assigned a mailbox. It is important for staff members to check their mailbox often while classes are in session. Paychecks and pay stubs, any phone messages, and all other important communications will be placed in the mailbox of staff members.

### Business Cards

Business cards are available to staff members of the *Torch* upon request. Staff members may place an order for business cards by writing a note and placing it in the editor-in-chief's mailbox.

### Computers

Journalism is a profession that relies upon computers. Staff members must be reasonably familiar and comfortable with computers, or possess the ability to become familiar and comfortable.

Under no circumstances are staff members to search for pornographic,



not-safe-for-work, or other materials deemed unethical or inappropriate for a professional office with a *Torch* computer. Discovery of such materials will result in termination from employment and possible referral to the Office of Student Conduct.

*Torch* computers may access social networks and instant messaging applications. However, staff members should be aware to switch off automatic login settings, and they should be sure to log out properly from social media and other communication applications when finished using a computer.

Newsroom computers may be used to do homework during downtimes. However, *Torch* business takes priority on these computers, and staff members may be asked to vacate a computer or switch tasks when there is work to do.

Production computers are to be used for production work only. No exceptions.

### **Logging on to the Network**

Each computer has a username and password for logging onto FSU's network. The editor-in-chief or section editors can provide this information to staff reporters.

### **E-mail**

All students have e-mail accounts that can be used for *Torch* business. The editor-in-chief has a separate e-mail account that is only used for *Torch* business. Staff members are required to give the editor-in-chief and their section editors their e-mail student email address for story ideas and for communication. Staff members using a non-FSU e-mail account to conduct *Torch* business must use a professional looking address.

FSU is currently using Gmail to provide e-mail services to students, staff, and faculty. Staff members' student email can be accessed by logging into MyFSU and selecting the e-mail icon.

### **Reporting Procedures**

Each week, section editors will assign articles and due dates to staff reporters. Assignments should have all of the important information needed for staff reporters to do a thorough job producing articles, including answers to who, what, when, where, why, and how, suggestions of people to interview, possible questions for reporters to ask, and possible angles for stories being produced.

For instance, a staff reporter might receive an assignment to cover a Board of Trustees meeting. The reporter would start by calling the board office to get an agenda, which would communicate what items will be covered – and what



are likely to be the most important items. Reporters can go to the newspaper's morgue (where old newspapers are kept), or the *Torch* website, to see what was written about the topic and what unfinished business occurred last time to follow up on.

When the reporter attends the meeting, he or she will keep their ears open for the most important bits of information. After the meeting concludes or during a break, the reporter should then ask questions about specific items on the agenda or from information shared during the meeting, or ask for an interview at a later time if more appropriate. It's a good rule of thumb that every position will have at least one opposing viewpoint, and it is the reporter's responsibility to make certain all credible sides are heard.

Taking complete notes is essential for the reporter to be able to pull direct quotes and accurate information from. Writing the article soon after the meeting or interview has concluded will aid the reporter in the writing process as well, as recall is much easier sooner rather than later. (Reporters must save their notes so if something goes wrong or the reporter is accused of libel, misquoting, or fabrication, proof of accuracy can be provided as evidence in court. This is especially important for any story which may be controversial.)

Above all, reporters should ask clarifying questions if they don't understand what a person has to say. Reporters should never publish something they're not 100 percent clear on, and reporters should never guess – it could sour relationships or become a responsibility they would rather not bear.

If an assignment seems to have information missing, reporters should ask their editor clarifying questions to be sure they're fulfilling the assignment as tasked. Editors are resources for reporters during the reporting and writing process, and can be contacted with questions during reasonable hours.

Reporters should set up interviews as soon as possible after getting their assignments. Reporters must remember to identify themselves as *Torch* reporters and politely request a convenient interview time. If just a few questions need to be asked, reporters have the option of conducting a phone interview.

Good reporters don't wait around for the story to come to them; they're proactive in scheduling interviews and seeking facts. If a key individual can't be interviewed for a story, the reporter should let his or her section editor know as soon as possible. The editor can then help the reporter arrange another interview or give suggestions on how to proceed. Reporters should also remember, some of the best articles are those that have the best research behind them.

Reporters should also be on the lookout for follow-up and bigger, more in-depth stories while conducting their interviews and research. Maybe another angle for presenting the story will become more apparent. When these opportunities present themselves, reporters should take the opportunity to approach their section editors with ideas. Reporters should remember they're working on a team: it's not entirely their responsibility to take on additional work, or another reporter

may already be working on the story. Informing section editors also keeps them in the loop because they might not know about the story.

Avoiding conflict of interest while working on a story is the responsibility of the reporter. They will not be permitted to cover an organization or event they're already participating in. If a reporter does belong to another campus organization, it's his or her responsibility to inform their section editor or editor-in-chief so a different reporter can cover the story in a timely fashion.

## **Plagiarism and Fair Use**

Plagiarism is the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own. Plagiarism is not tolerated in an academic setting, nor is it accepted at the *Torch*. There are laws and regulations set up by the United States Congress governing plagiarism and the fair use of copyrighted works. *Torch* staff must credit source materials when they use other works in their writing.

When writing an article for the *Torch*, the limitation on fair use is the same as what the U.S. Congress has agreed upon: Do not use more than 10 percent of someone else's work.

## **Planning is Essential**

- What type of information is important? What is the story angle? Who are the sources? Reporters need to answer these questions to formulate their interview questions accordingly.
- Reporters should research their stories. They should possess some knowledge of their topics before approaching the interview to save some embarrassment.
- Location. Location. Location. Reporters should set up interviews in places that set their sources at ease.
- Reporters should also set up the interview situation. Will the interview be in-person, over the phone, or by e-mail?
- Reporters should be at least 10 minutes early to the interview, or at the very least, on time.
- Reporters should dress appropriately for the interview. Formal or business attire may intimidate some students, as they may feel they are at a disadvantage. Likewise, when reporters interview officers in FSU's administration, they are to dress at a minimum in business casual. In addition to wearing appropriate clothing for the situation, *Torch* reporters may be asked to take with them an official *Torch* press pass for identification purposes.
- Preparation is key, and reporters should bring the supplies they need with them to interviews and events. They should bring pens, notepads, and make sure their smartphones are charged.



- Those who fail to plan, plan to fail. Reporters who enter an interview without a plan probably won't get the quality or breadth of information they would otherwise hope to gain.

## **Conducting Interviews**

Reporters should be friendly and professional. Most sources open up when they don't feel threatened. Reporters should be aware, however, that some sources are almost always hostile to the media.

The consequences of being prepared is reporters are familiar with their line of questioning. Reporters should write down questions in advance. Comments by sources will prompt new questions for the prepared reporter, and are great opportunities to get information that might have otherwise been unknown to the reporter and readers.

What questions should reporters ask? If reporters are asking this question when it is time to conduct the interview, they failed to properly plan.

Reporters should take accurate and plentiful notes. Reporters should be careful to get quotes word for word, but shouldn't try to write everything down. A digital recording device or smartphone application can help.

Reporters should be courteous and interested in what the person has to say. Eye contact and posture send the message the reporter cares about what's being said and builds trust with the person being interviewed.

How reporters can handle the "no comment" response:

- Tell the source that "no comment" gives readers the impression they have something to hide.
- Tell the source that you will probably get the information from another source, but that he or she has the first shot at telling the facts.
- Tell the source that at least part of the story is already known. This puts their credibility and reliability on the line.

Reporters sometimes will interview emotionally distraught people. Here's how to approach these sources:

- The reporter should make him or her feel comfortable.
- The reporter should show some empathy. This will show the source they're cared about as a person and not as a story.

Reporters do well when they listen more than they talk. Sources are likely to talk more when they're given ample opportunity.

Reporters should ask open-ended questions when interviewing sources. These questions leave room for explanation rather than simple "yes" or "no" answers. Good open ended questions begin with the words "what," "how," or "why." Statements can also be used to get sources talking, usually beginning with "tell me more about..." or "describe to me..."

Reporters should get permission from sources to take photographs, and



absolutely get permission from parents before displaying minors in the newspaper.

Reporters should never grant an off-the-record interview or use someone's quote anonymously without prior consent from the editor-in-chief (see the policy on Anonymous Sources and Off-the-Record Interviews on pg. 7).

## **Appendix A**

Below is a reproduction of the Society for Professional Journalism/Sigma Delta Chi Code of Ethics. This document can also be found at [spj.org/ethicscode.asp](http://spj.org/ethicscode.asp).

### **Society of Professional Journalists/Sigma Delta Chi Code of Ethics**

#### **Preamble**

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. Ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough. An ethical journalist acts with integrity.

The Society declares these four principles as the foundation of ethical journalism and encourages their use in its practice by all people in all media.

#### **Seek Truth and Report It**

Ethical journalism should be accurate and fair. Journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

Journalists should:

- Take responsibility for the accuracy of their work. Verify information before releasing it. Use original sources whenever possible.
- Remember that neither speed nor format excuses inaccuracy.
- Provide context. Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting, previewing or summarizing a story.
- Gather, update and correct information throughout the life of a news story.
- Be cautious when making promises, but keep the promises they make.
- Identify sources clearly. The public is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources.
- Consider sources' motives before promising anonymity. Reserve anonymity for sources who may face danger, retribution or other harm, and have information that cannot be obtained elsewhere. Explain why anonymity was granted.
- Diligently seek subjects of news coverage to allow them to respond to criticism or allegations of wrongdoing.

- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information unless traditional, open methods will not yield information vital to the public.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. Give voice to the voiceless.
- Support the open and civil exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- Recognize a special obligation to serve as watchdogs over public affairs and government. Seek to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open, and that public records are open to all.
- Provide access to source material when it is relevant and appropriate.
- Boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience. Seek sources whose voices we seldom hear.
- Avoid stereotyping. Journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting.
- Label advocacy and commentary.
- Never deliberately distort facts or context, including visual information. Clearly label illustrations and re-enactments.
- Never plagiarize. Always attribute.

### **Minimize Harm**

Ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect.

Journalists should:

- Balance the public's need for information against potential harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance or undue intrusiveness.
- Show compassion for those who may be affected by news coverage. Use heightened sensitivity when dealing with juveniles, victims of sex crimes, and sources or subjects who are inexperienced or unable to give consent. Consider cultural differences in approach and treatment.
- Recognize that legal access to information differs from an ethical justification to publish or broadcast.
- Realize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than public figures and others who seek power, influence or attention. Weigh the consequences of publishing or broadcasting personal information.
- Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity, even if others do.
- Balance a suspect's right to a fair trial with the public's right to know. Consider the implications of identifying criminal suspects before they face legal charges.
- Consider the long-term implications of the extended reach and permanence of publication. Provide updated and more complete information as appropriate.



## **Act Independently**

The highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism is to serve the public. Journalists should:

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and avoid political and other outside activities that may compromise integrity or impartiality, or may damage credibility.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; do not pay for access to news. Identify content provided by outside sources, whether paid or not.
- Deny favored treatment to advertisers, donors or any other special interests, and resist internal and external pressure to influence coverage.
- Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two. Prominently label sponsored content.

## **Be Accountable and Transparent**

Ethical journalism means taking responsibility for one's work and explaining one's decisions to the public.

Journalists should:

- Explain ethical choices and processes to audiences. Encourage a civil dialogue with the public about journalistic practices, coverage and news content.
- Respond quickly to questions about accuracy, clarity and fairness.
- Acknowledge mistakes and correct them promptly and prominently. Explain corrections and clarifications carefully and clearly.
- Expose unethical conduct in journalism, including within their organizations.
- Abide by the same high standards they expect of others.

## **Appendix B**

### ***Torch* Governing Document**

The *Torch* is the student newspaper at Ferris State University. Its content is determined solely by students who comprise the editorial staff of the newspaper. Any student may apply for a staff position at the *Torch*. The only absolute requirement for employment at the *Torch* is student status.

The student press of Ferris State University shall be free of censorship as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. Student editors are free to determine the editorial policies and news coverage and content without interference from the faculty, staff, or administration of Ferris State University. The student newspaper shall not be subjected to policies that constitute prior restraint, such as



advance approval of copy, or to policies that produce a chilling effect on student press freedom.

Ferris State University recognizes the value of the free and open discussion facilitated by the student newspaper and encourages faculty, staff, and students to take an active interest in the newspaper.

The student newspaper at Ferris State University is administrated through the Department of Languages and Literature. The role of the department is to serve as a link between the newspaper and the university and to assist the newspaper in its efforts to meet the needs of the community it serves. The department provides the newspaper with an adviser and support in the form of information needed to operate within the policies of Ferris State University. The university also provides support in other ways, such as financially to provide for operating costs, computers and equipment, technology services, and office spaces in the Alumni Building.

### Adviser

The adviser is a faculty member in the Languages and Literature Department with experience in journalism or a related field who helps the *Torch* staff maintain professional journalistic standards. The adviser, currently Steven Fox, has no decision-making power regarding the content of the newspaper. He should not be involved in determining the content of the paper except in an advisory capacity and as specifically requested by the *Torch* staff.

The adviser shall:

- Be available to the newspaper staff for consultation on professional and legal issues and actively promote knowledge of an adherence to professional journalistic standards. The adviser should not only stay current on journalistic practice, but should keep both the *Torch* staff and the department head informed about important issues in journalism as they apply to the *Torch* so that staff can develop and maintain high journalistic standards.
- Provide a source of continuity for the *Torch* staff. Turnover at a college newspaper can be dramatic from year to year, and the adviser is the most important link between years so the new staff doesn't have to reinvent procedures instead of working on the content of the newspaper.
- Ensure that all staff members receive a copy of and follow the written policies of the *Torch*.
- Develop and/or advise the editorial manual as needed. The manual should be reviewed yearly.
- Address complaints from the readers if they cannot be satisfactorily resolved by the editor-in-chief. The editor-in-chief is primarily responsible for resolving complaints, and the adviser should not be involved until the complaint

has been addressed by the editor-in-chief.

- Ensure the university policies are being correctly followed.
- Ensure the facilities and equipment at the *Torch* are adequate and up to date.
- Report to the Languages and Literature Department Head about *Torch* operations and any problems that might arise regarding publication.
- Organize and oversee the editor-in-chief selection process each year. He shall initiate committee selection as set forth in this document. The adviser shall initiate advertising and other appropriate means of communication to ensure all students are aware of the availability of the editor-in-chief position and are aware of the selection process. The adviser also arranges selection committee meetings, provides the committee with all needed information about applicants and advises them on journalistic practice and qualifications.
- Provide administrative supervision for *Torch* operations. The adviser approves all purchase requests, supervises the *Torch* distribution staff member, and serves as a liaison between the newspaper and the university.

### **Department Head**

The Head of the Languages and Literature Department are responsible for approving *Torch* requests for purchasing and hiring. The department head is also the final arbiter of complaints against the *Torch*.

The department head:

- Approves all purchase order requests for equipment and supplies.
- Ensures the university policies are being correctly followed.
- Hears complaints from readers that have already been addressed by the editor-in-chief and the adviser but not been satisfactorily resolved.

Approvals on purchases are generally given without question, unless the department chair can identify a reason why the purchase should not be made. No attempt should be made to exert influence on the content of the newspaper through such decisions.

### **Editor-in-Chief**

The editor-in-chief is the chief executive of the *Torch*, and directs all of the paper's editorial and production activities. The editor-in-chief is responsible for all major policy decisions of the newspaper not decided elsewhere and for ensuring the *Torch* follows all relevant university policies. The editor-in-chief should be considered the leader of a management team responsible for publishing quality, independent student newspaper responsive to the needs of the campus community it serves.



The editor-in-chief determines the editorial content of the *Torch* (any exceptions will be noted in the policies of this manual). On matters unrelated to editorial content, such as items relating to staff and management, the editor-in-chief is the final voice; however, the editor-in-chief is under the administrative supervision of the *Torch* faculty adviser and the Department of Languages and Literature.

The editor-in-chief:

- Selects editors, writers, photographers, and graphic artists in consultation with the faculty adviser and section editors on the basis of written applications and interviews, screening applicants of positions according to their ability to perform specific duties.
- Directs (or delegates) daily operations in the *Torch* newsroom, making sure deadlines are met, making sure copy is edited properly, making sure staff members are meeting minimum requirements and are following editorial policy, and making sure that all relevant news is being covered.
- Conducts meetings of the section editors to determine content for the next issue and to discuss any problems that have arisen or could develop as a result of upcoming news coverage.
- Conducts regular staff meetings to critique the most recent newspaper for content and mechanics.
- Develops, with faculty adviser, a relevant training program for new and returning editorial staff members and participates in the training.
- Represents the *Torch* in a public relations capacity on committees and at various functions.
- Reports for the newspaper when time allows.
- Ensures that special pages and sections are planned and completed according to production guidelines.
- Works with editorial staff to develop organizational goals and plans to meet organizational goals.
- Writes (or delegates) the unsigned *Torch* editorials.
- Oversees the operation of each editorial section of the paper (News, Lifestyles, Sports, Opinions, Satire, Entertainment).
- Provides leadership and maintains morale of the *Torch* staff.
- Oversee the production aspects of the paper, including working with production staff to produce an aesthetically pleasing newspaper and working with the printer to maintain a quality product.

### **Selection of the Editor-in-Chief**

The editor-in-chief determines the voice of the *Torch* each year, and so selection of the person who will provide leadership and represent the campus



community through the student newspaper should include input from as many aspects of the campus as possible. The editor-in-chief is selected by a committee made up of the following possibilities:

- A faculty member appointed by the Faculty Senate.
- A faculty member appointed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs.
- A staff member appointed by the President of Ferris State University.
- A student appointed by the Student Government of Ferris State University.
- A student recruited by the President of Ferris State University.
- A student recruited by the *Torch* editorial staff.
- A student recruited by the Director of Student Activities.

Committee membership is unrestricted with the following exceptions:

- The Department Head of Languages and Literature may not serve on the committee.
- Individuals who have served two consecutive years on the committee may not serve on the committee.
- Appointments to the committee that would create an imbalance in student representation. There should be at least as many students as non-students on the committee.
- No current staff member of the *Torch* may serve on the committee.

The selection process is initiated each year by the adviser, who advertises the position opening, gathers the committee appointments, and arranges committee meetings and applicant interviews. The adviser must present all editor-in-chief applications to the committee so any decision about which applicants to interview, if all applicants have not been interviewed, is made by the committee.

Any complaints about the committee's decisions or actions will be addressed to the committee if issues or concerns are raised in the semester the committee makes its selection. Complaints about the committee process after the semester has concluded will be addressed by the adviser and the department head.

Committee appointments should be made by March 1 each year. Selection of a new editor-in-chief should occur no later than April 1 so the new editor-in-chief can receive training before the end of the school year.

### **Removing the Editor-in-Chief**

Upon 30 days' written notice from either party to the other party, the employment agreement between Ferris State University and the *Torch* editor-in-chief can be terminated.

Violations of any of the provisions of the employment agreement can be grounds for immediate termination at the discretion of the adviser in consultation

with the Head of the Languages and Literature Department. The editor-in-chief also may be dismissed or suspended for violating university policies or regulations.

Until termination or expiration of the employment agreement, the editor-in-chief is expected to continue fulfilling the obligations and duties outlined in the employment agreement.

## Special Notice on Legal Issues

Protecting the *Torch* against lawsuits of any kind is always a *Torch* staff member's responsibility. Some of the following tips may help each staff member avoid legal actions:

- Staff members shall never present information without identifying a source.
- Staff members shall use any copyrighted material sparingly, and always identify the source of this material. Copyrighted material is anything in print, including newspaper articles, private notes, photographs, artwork, stories from the internet, etc. If staff members use materials not original to their works or belonging to the *Torch*, it must be determined if the material is public domain or needs permission to be reprinted. For example:
  - The *Torch* may not print ads created at another newspaper without permission from that newspaper. For more information about advertising see the advertising policy on Page 9.
  - The *Torch* may not use artwork of any kind unless the newspaper has purchased the right to do so.
  - Staff members shall never accept art from a source unless the person has received permission to reprint such art. Some advertisers think they can clip out art from cards or use art from their own computers.
- Staff members shall never write an article using one printed source to accomplish it. It is okay to cite a maximum of 10 percent of something read, but the more of the source used in the article, the more the *Torch* could come into legal jeopardy.
- Staff members shall never present individuals as criminals unless they have been found guilty in a court of law for the crime being written about. In other words, staff members cannot say someone committed a crime unless they are found guilty. Reporters may say someone allegedly did something; this means they have been accused of a crime, but they may be not guilty of any crime. Reporters may not print the name of the accused until the person has been formally charged by a court.
- Material printed in the *Torch* becomes the property of the *Torch* and may not be duplicated or replicated under any circumstances without special permission from the *Torch*. This also applies to web-only content posted to the *Torch* online news site.

## **CERTIFICATE OF RECEIPT**

Torch employees must sign upon receiving a copy of the Policy Manual and turn this page into the editor-in-chief.

This page certifies that I have received a copy of the Ferris State Torch Policy Manual.

Staff Member's Name:

Signature:

Date:

Publication Year:

Editor-in-Chief Signature upon receipt: