



To whom it may concern,

Sharing accurate, up-to-date information has perhaps never been more important than it is during the COVID-19 pandemic. College Media Association encourages you to consider student media an essential function during this international health crisis.

Professional media outlets already are considered essential because of their role informing the public about the crisis. Student media outlets and the journalists who report for them are critical in the reporting of information to your school's community as well. They report the story in a college-focused way, providing vastly different information from what's being provided by other media outlets in your area. Informing the campus community about what is happening is critical. No one else is going to cover campus news the way the student journalists and student media practitioners will, making them essential to continue serving students, faculty and staff during this critical time.

Because of the critical nature of their work, student media outlets should be given reasonable access to equipment and full support in working remotely. Student journalists around the country are working digital shifts, monitoring online discussions for developing stories and continuing to do the consistently state- and nationally-award-winning work they always do, just in a remote form for the sake of safety. This also gives the students an amazing opportunity to learn how to shift their operations to a digital format, and how they will communicate and keep doing their work in this ever-changing environment. They're trailblazers, learning and creating content through this experiential education opportunity that student media provides. It's an opportunity that would be stripped from them if they were told they could no longer work. At the same time, decisions related to what content and reporting looks like should be left up to the independent student media outlets' editorial leadership, as normal.

Members of student media who are paid also should be considered essential workers and, therefore, continue receiving their pay while working remotely. Administrators also must still honor situations where students receive academic credit or internship credit for student media work. Shutting down student media operations would prevent those students from receiving that credit or graduating according to their schedules.

Keeping student media outlets from functioning violates students' First Amendment rights. It also deprives your campus community of a vital link to their shared community and to information they need in this crisis and hinders the students ability to learn during an important, hands-on learning opportunity. The purpose of student media is to educate. Students are writing the rules on how this type of coverage and production is done on your campus, in the same way that their professional counterparts are in the nation. This is the ultimate learning experience for student journalists. Administrators would be remiss to force them not to learn at a time when students could be leading the way.

Don't take away a key professional learning opportunity for your media students as well as a news vehicle for your community. Please take steps to keep your college's media outlets operating and support your student media practitioners. The adaptive work student journalists will do during this time will help them develop portfolios, and likely will help them earn internships and post-graduation employment. Regardless of the outcome, this is an unprecedented learning opportunity for student journalists.

College Media Association Board of Directors