



Office of the  
PRESIDENT

December 6, 2018

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SEJC President

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University of Louisiana at Lafayette (retired)  
SEJC Past President

Tomi McCutchen, M.A.  
University of Tennessee at Martin  
SEJC Past President

Dear Southeast Journalism Conference Officials:

Thank you for your letter of November 29, 2018. As president of the University of North Alabama, please know that I take seriously your expressions of concern regarding the student media adviser's position.

I wish to assure you that the First Amendment is alive and well at UNA. I celebrate it as a citizen, I teach it as a professor of political science, and I protect it as president of this University. The decisions made to transition the position of media adviser to faculty status do not involve any considerations that constitute a threat to the First Amendment. Rather, they reflect sound, fair, and deliberative decisions that are consistent with our academic needs and recommended practices in the field of student journalism.

Our move to transition the media adviser's position from staff to faculty status has been in process for some time, and we shared clear, written evidence of that decision timeline with the College Media Association. Inexplicably, CMA did not acknowledge that evidence in any of its subsequent communications.

No CMA representatives visited our campus as part of the investigation, and no CMA representatives asked to speak with me regarding the Association's concerns. Moreover, the CMA's principal investigator admitted that his own investigation found "no smoking gun" to substantiate the current media adviser's claims. The investigator affirmed that UNA administrators have an "honest desire" to improve the Department of Communications and observed, "there is nothing to indicate these administrators do not have the best interests of the college, its students and faculty at heart." There is a troubling disconnect between these findings and CMA's decision to censure.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education has not taken a position on the matter involving our media adviser. FIRE has asked us for clarification on our informal process for working with the media. We have responded positively to that inquiry. Our organizational practices in dealing with media inquiries are already in alignment with FIRE guidelines, and soon we will have a statement in place that is consistent with the one featured on the FIRE website.

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I hope you find this information useful and reassuring. Please know that my colleagues and I value your good work and look forward to continuing our association with the Southeast Journalism Conference.

Sincerely,



Kenneth D. Kitts, Ph.D.  
President

KDK/rbs

pc: Recipients of November 29 SEJC Correspondence  
Dr. Ross Alexander, UNA Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost  
Dr. Butler Cain, Chair of UNA Department of Communications  
Dr. Jim Purcell, Executive Director of Alabama Commission on Higher Education  
Mr. Charles Ball, Chairman of Alabama Commission on Higher Education  
Ms. Felicia Mason, Executive Director of Alabama Press Association  
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