

## Code of Ethics for RMSMC journalists

Based in large part on the Model Code of Ethics for Collegiate Journalists, Associated Collegiate Press, written by Albert DeLuca and Tom Rolnicki (Fourth edition revised by Brian Steffen).

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**01 Free Travel:** To remain as free of influence or obligation to report a story, student journalists in pursuit of a story should not accept free travel, accommodations or meals related to travel. For convenience, sports reporters may travel on team charters, but the RMSMC will reimburse the cost of the transportation and related expenses. The same pay-as-you-go policy applies to non-sports reporting as well, including businesses and governments. Free travel and accommodations that are non-coverage related and provided by a vendor may be accepted if the primary purpose is for education or training and is related to the fulfillment of an agreement or contract.

**02 Gifts:** Gifts should not be accepted. Any gift should be returned to the sender or sent to a charity. If the gift is of de minimis (no significant) value, such as a desk trinket, small food item or pen, the staff member may retain the gift. As a guideline, if the value is under \$10, the gift may be kept. More than one gift in one year, even if under \$10, from the same giver, may not be accepted.

**03 Free tickets, Passes, Discounts:** RMSMC staff members assigned to report on a sporting event, lecture, play, concert, movie or other entertainment event should pay for admission. The company will reimburse staff member expenses, with prior approval (no prior approval needed for breaking news). Free tickets or passes may be accepted by staff members assigned to cover an event or by those attending for legitimate news purposes. Press facilities at these events may only be used by staff members who are assigned to cover the event. Free tickets or passes may be accepted by staff members for personal use, only if tickets are available on the same complimentary basis to non-journalists.

**04 Ownership of Books, Music, & Other Products Given for Review:** Any materials given to the RMSMC media for review become the property of the publication and not of any individual staff member. The Executive Editor reserves the right to disperse the property in an equitable way.

**05 Other Employment:** Other employment should not conflict with the staffer's responsibilities to a RMSMC medium. The staffer must report any other employment to the editor or manager to avoid any conflicts of interest with assignments or other staff editorial or business responsibilities or influences.

**06 Other Off-campus or Freelance Media Work:** Approval of work for an off-campus news medium and freelance media work should be sought in advance of the commitment. It is permissible on a staffer's own time and should not conflict with the staffer's

obligations to RMSMC media.

**07 Online Media Work:** RMSMC student journalists who establish their own web media, blogs or similar media must not allow personal media to give the appearance that these media are connected with, sponsored by or sanctioned by the RMSMC or any of its media. Editors and managers should draft and enforce policies governing the work of student journalists in the online environment as that work impacts the ability of RMSMC media to serve the Colorado State campus community.

**08 Memberships in Campus Organizations:** Staffers may not cover a campus organization they belong to, or participate in any editorial or business decisions regarding that organization. Staffers may provide story leads about the organizations to which they belong to other staffers. Staffers should report their memberships to their supervising editor or manager. To maintain the role of the press as an independent watchdog of government, a staffer with responsibilities for news coverage should not be an elected or appointed member of student government.

**09 Outside Activities, Including Political:** Political involvement, holding off campus public office and service in community organizations should be considered carefully to avoid compromising professional integrity and that of the publication. The notion of the journalist as an independent observer and fact-finder is important to preserve. A staffer involved in specific political action, especially in a leadership role, should not be assigned to cover that involvement unless such relationships are approved by the editor or manager and disclosed to readers, viewers and listeners.

**10 Relationships and Coverage:** Staffers must declare conflicts and avoid involvement in stories dealing with members of their families, or people in whom they have close, personal relationship with. Staff members should not cover — in words, photographs, artwork, or broadcast content — or make news judgments about family members or persons with whom they have financial, adversarial, romantic, sexual or closely personal relationships. Intrastaff dating, where one person assigns or evaluates the work of the other person, determines the rate of pay, or if one is in a position to promote or assign the other to a higher staff position, must be disclosed. In this instance, a reassignment of positions is possible.

**11 Use of Alcoholic Beverages or Other Substances While on Assignment:** Even though a staffer may be able to drink legally, no or only light drinking in a social setting such as a dinner or reception is recommended to avoid any suspicion by a source or the public that the staffer's judgment, credibility or objectivity is impaired by alcohol. When covering an event where alcohol is served, staffers should not accept free drinks unless all drinks are free to everyone in attendance. Staffers should avoid the appearance that they are being "wined and dined" by any source or group.

**12 Sexual Harassment:** Sexual harassment is: (verbal) suggestive comments, sexual innuendo, threats, insults, jokes about sex-specific traits, sexual propositions; (nonverbal) vulgar gestures, whistling, leering, suggestive or insulting noises; (physical) touching, pinching, brushing the body, coercing sexual intercourse, assault. Sexual harassment can

be called job-related harassment when submission is made implicitly or explicitly a condition of employment, a condition of work related assignments, compensation and other factors, or if such conduct interferes with the staffer's performance or creates a hostile, intimidating or offensive work environment. Sexual harassment is prohibited. All claims of harassment must be promptly reported to Mario Caballero, Equal Opportunity Office representative. The RMSMC's harassment policies and procedures (please company documents for detailed procedures) include at least two alternate methods of reporting, information on how the claim will be investigated, and what will be done to correct the situation if it is real harassment. The student media head is responsible for ensuring a staff meeting is held prior to the start of each semester each year and new staff members and volunteers are provided with the RMSMC's harassment policies and procedures.

**13 Plagiarism of Words, Art, Other:** For the purposes of this code, plagiarism is defined as the word-for-word duplication of another person's writing or close summarization of the work of another source without giving the source proper credit. A comparable prohibition applies to the use of graphics and broadcast materials. Information obtained from a published work must be independently verified before it can be reported as a new, original story. This policy also forbids lifting verbatim paragraphs from a wire service, publication, or broadcast entity without attribution or pointing out that wire stories were used in compiling the story. Material that is published on the Internet should be treated in the same way as if it were published in more traditional broadcast media. Because plagiarism can significantly undermine the public trust of journalists and journalism, editors and managers will consider severe penalties for documented cases of plagiarism, including dismissal from the staff.

**14 Fabrication of Any Kind:** The use of composite characters or imaginary situations or characters will not be allowed in news or feature stories. A columnist may, occasionally, use such an approach in developing a piece, but it must be clear to the reader that the person or situation is fictional and that the column is commentary and not reporting. The growth of narrative story development (storytelling devices) means that reporters, editors and broadcasters should be especially careful to not mix fact and fiction, and not embellish fact with fictional details, regardless of their significance. Because fabrication can significantly undermine the public trust of journalists and journalism, editors and managers will consider severe penalties for documented cases of fabrication, including dismissal from the staff.

**15 Electronically Altered Photos:** Electronically altering the content of photos or videos for news and general feature stories or as stand-alone news and feature photos or videos is not allowed. Exceptions to this would be adjustments to contrast and similar technical enhancements that don't affect the truthfulness of the subject and context of the subject or the scene. Content may be altered for creative purposes as a special effect for a feature story if the caption or credit line includes that fact and if an average reader would not mistake the photo or video for reality. These photos and videos are usually tagged as photo illustrations. In a news medium, readers and viewers expect photos and stories to be truthful.

**16 Photographic Illustration and Re-enactments:** Set-ups or posed scenes may be used if the average reader will not be misled or if the caption or credit line tells readers or viewers that it is a photo illustration, video composite, or a re-enactment or re-staging of an event, including award presentations. Recording the original action is always preferred.

**17 Use of Photographs and Video of Victims of Accidents, Fires, Natural Disasters:** Photos and video have a tremendous impact on readers. The question of privacy versus the public's right to know should be considered. The line between good and bad taste and reality and sensationalism is not always easy to draw. Care should be taken to maintain the dignity of the subject as much as possible without undermining the truth of the event. In making a final decision on a photo or video of this type, an editor should consider: Do the readers or viewers need information from this photo that helps explain the event better than words or another photo? Who is hurt by the publication of this photo or airing of the video? How would I react if my photograph or video were taken at such a moment of tragedy and anguish?

**18 Reporting Names, Addresses of Crime Victims:** Staffers need to know Colorado state laws that govern the publication or airing of the names of crime victims. Customarily, the names of rape victims are not published or broadcast; however, some news media have asked victims of sexual assault to identify themselves for public release. This may be negotiated between the victim and the medium. Victims of nonsexual crimes may be identified, but the media have a responsibility to give some protection to the victims such as giving imprecise addresses. With the exception of major crimes, predetermined by the editor or broadcast manager, an arrested person is not named until charges are filed. However, to avoid a subjective list of exceptions, it is acceptable to withhold all names, regardless of the crime, until charges are filed.

**19 Cooperation with Law Enforcement, Government, College Administration:** To be an effective watchdog on other agencies, RMSMC media must remain independent. The media should not take over any of the duties of any outside agency; cooperation or involvement in the work of these agencies should be restricted to what is required by law. Staffers should know any freedom of information, open meetings and shield laws that apply to their work. If a staffer thinks any public authority is interfering with the staffer's functions as a journalist, the incident should be reported to the editor or manager and the medium's professional adviser. The editor or manager should then seek advice from their RMSMC adviser, who will consult with the RMSMC's legal counsel or, when appropriate, such groups as the Student Press Law Center or American Civil Liberties Union.

**20 Scrutiny of a Public Person's Life:** Conflicts exist between a person's desire for privacy and the public good or the public's right to know about a public person's life. Persons who freely choose to become public celebrities or public servants should expect a greater level of scrutiny of their life than a private person—even a private person who suddenly is involved in a public situation. Staffers should make judgments based on the real news value of the situation, common sense and decency. Reporters and photographers should not badger a person who has made it clear that he or she does not

want to be interviewed or photographed. One exception is those who are involved in criminal activity or in court. Publishing or broadcasting intimate details of a person's life, such as their health or sexual activities, should be done with extreme care and only if the facts are important for the completeness of a story and reflect in a significant way upon the person's public life.

**21 Profane, Vulgar Words, Explicit Sexual Language:** Out of concern for readers, listeners and viewers, student media broadcasts, publications, and web media (including podcasts) do not publish or broadcast profanity except under special circumstances described below. Certainly, in light of rules covering broadcasts, the use of profane words in broadcasting may result in harsh government sanctions and or fines and, therefore, are unacceptable. In the print or web media, the use of profanity in headlines or similar typographic treatment is not permitted. However, in unusual cases involving print or web media, the editor-in-chief or broadcast manager may find that publishing a profane word in text is essential to readers' understanding. In considering the use of profanity, the responsible student executive is required to weigh (a) potential ramifications, (b) consider whether there are alternatives (e.g., f\*\*\* or sh\*t) that would not interfere with readers' understanding, and (c) the use of profanity for frivolous reasons or simply for "shock" value exposes the student media in general and the student executive or editor-in-chief in particular to potential harm that could lead to disciplinary action ranging from reprimand to dismissal. Digital media managers and producers should also redact profane and vulgar terms from the website comment section by using the same alternatives used in the printed publication. To protect the student executive or editor-in-chief whenever the use of profanity is under consideration, the editor-in-chief or other student executives are encouraged to discuss the use of profanity in advance with their respective RMSMC adviser, general manager or president as well as the heads of other media to fully explore the issues and possible alternatives. Explicit language—but not vulgar, street language—describing sexual activities and human body parts and functions should be used for accurate reporting of health stories and, in a more limited way, for sexual crime stories.

**22 Sexist Language:** Staffers should avoid sexist labels and descriptive language. Replace such language with neutral terms and descriptions.

**23 Negative Stereotyping:** Staffers should take care in writing and broadcasting to avoid applying commonly thought but usually erroneous group stereotypes to individuals who are a member of a particular group. Generalizations, often based upon stereotypes, can be misleading and inaccurate. In a broader sense, writers, photographers and artists should avoid subtle stereotyping in their selection of interviewees and subjects of photographs or illustrations. Some examples of negative stereotypes: unmarried, black teen; welfare mothers; unemployed, alcohol using Native Americans; overweight, long-haired white biker outlaws; effeminate gays; inarticulate, "dumb" blonde women. It is also advisable to avoid sexual stereotyping in choice of subjects for stories, photographs and illustrations on sports or political or social issues such as equal rights.

**24 Use of Racial, Ethnic, Religious, Sexual Orientation, Other Group Identifiers:** Identification of a person as a member of any population group should be limited to those cases when that membership is essential for the reader's complete understanding of the

story; it should be done with great care so as not to perpetuate negative or positive group stereotyping. When identifiers are used, it is important that the correct one be used. Some examples of identifiers: Hispanic, Jew, lesbian, Italian, person with AIDS (PWA), physically challenged, deaf (or partially deaf). Please consult the style manual of the Associated Press or another news organization for guidance in properly and accurately identifying individuals on the basis of their membership in ethnic or religious groups or on the basis of their sexual orientation.

**25 False Identity, Stolen Documents, Concealed Recording, Eavesdropping:** In the ordinary course of reporting, no staffers shall misrepresent themselves as anything other than representatives of the RMSMC they represent. Staffers may not steal or knowingly receive stolen materials regardless of their importance to a story. Except in situations judged by an editor as extraordinary, a staffer shall not record an interview or meeting without the interviewee's permission or the obvious placement of a recording device (not hidden) at the start of the interview or meeting in which case the interviewee or newsmakers do not object and are aware of the presence of the recording device. Committing an illegal act to eavesdrop on a source is not allowed. Colorado laws on the use of recording devices should be checked. Editors and managers will consider severe penalties for violations of this policy, including dismissal from the staff.

**26 Granting and Preserving Confidentiality to Sources:** A reporter should not promise confidentiality to a source without the permission of the editor or broadcast manager. Confidentiality should only be given if there is a real danger that physical, emotional or financial harm will come to the source if his/her name is revealed. The editor or manager should have all the facts and the source's name before the decision is made. The editor or manager should know of any laws pertaining to confidentiality and disclosure before a decision is made. A reporter should make every attempt to get the same information from another source who agrees to be named since the goal is to attribute all information to a specific source for all stories.

**27 Anonymous Sources:** Generally, anonymous sources are not used in stories. Information that comes from an unnamed or unknown source should not be used unless it can be verified through another, known source. If two independent sources verify the information and both are unnamed, an editor may decide to publish or broadcast the information with careful consideration of the need for immediacy and the news value of the information. The source may be identified generally as one associated with an agency to give some degree of credibility to the information. (See 26: Confidentiality.) The danger exists that the reader or viewer might not believe the information if sources are not given; the medium's credibility might suffer; information obtained later from a named source and verified might disprove the information given by the unnamed or unknown sources. No anonymous source may be used without an editor verifying the legitimacy of the source. A reporter or editor unwilling to protect the identity of the source to authorities should strongly consider refraining from using the source.

**28 No Response from Subject:** If the subject of a story does not respond to a reporter's inquiry, the reporter may use the failure to respond in the story. However, use the verb "refused" to respond cautiously because of its connotation. It is often better to use

“declined” or “would not respond.” If the subject cannot be reached, it is acceptable to say that the subject was not available for comment, or the subject was not immediately available for comment. The difference between not responding and not available for comment should be clear to readers, viewers and listeners.

**29 Sources on the Internet:** Reporters who use the Internet and e-mail to interview sources should identify themselves as a reporter immediately, and should verify the sources identify with a follow-up telephone call. The source should be told that the information given is for a story. Information from Internet chat rooms and bulletin boards should not be used except as background or if it is used, it should be attributed as “from the Internet.” Since some information on the Internet may not be accurate, verification of facts through another source is especially important. Raising particular concern among journalists is information from so-called “user generated” sites such as Wikipedia, YouTube, blogs, Facebook and others. While not necessarily inaccurate, such sites allow users to post information and allegations without the benefit of editing or fact-checking.

**30 Corrections:** An inaccuracy is never knowingly published or broadcast. If any error is found, the RMSMC medium is obligated to correct the error as soon as possible, regardless of the source of the error. A consistent location for the publication of corrections is recommended. Such a location could be on the editorial or op-ed page of a newspaper. It should be clearly and prominently labeled as a correction. Since College Avenue is published infrequently, corrections should be published in the Collegian. Clarifications may also be labeled and published in the same manner. For online publications, corrections can be published at the top or bottom of the story in question. Even in the age of the Internet, journalism is still regarded as the ‘the first rough draft of history.’ As such, journalists should always keep in mind the impacts their factual errors may have on the future record of a person or event. Editors should judge what policies they should develop to govern requests to modify or even delete information from their Websites, which can continue to haunt journalists and their sources for years after publication or broadcasting.

**31 Ownership of Work:** Regardless of whether a staffer is paid or a volunteer, the RMSMC “owns” published and unpublished or broadcast work done by staffers if the work was done as a staff assignment. Ownership of unpublished or broadcast media that is not broadcast or published may revert to the staffer at a certain time if the editor or manager agrees with this arrangement, but the RMSMC retains the right to an unlimited use of the work. The act of voluntarily joining a staff indicates approval of this policy. As is practiced in professional media, readers, viewers and listeners of the student media should be made aware that ownership of submissions is taken by the student press at the time of submission. Each medium is responsible for administering appropriate documents transferring ownership to be signed by contributors who submit materials for consideration.

**32 Contests, Honors:** RMSMC media have a proprietary interest in the material it publishes and broadcasts. Thus, editors, managers and advisers are entitled to determine which entries will represent each medium in contests. This will avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest that might occur if staffers were to win or accept awards from

organizations they are assigned to cover. Awards presented to the staff as a whole or to the medium generally become the property of the medium. Individuals who win awards for work published in the staff publication or broadcast on KCSU or CTV may accept the award and retain ownership of it.

**33 Separation of Reporting from Commentary:** To help the reader separate fact-based reporting from commentary, in the form of personal columns, editorials, analysis and similar opinion writing, all commentary should be labeled or somehow clearly and consistently identified as opinion, especially when it is outside the editorial or op-ed pages and mixed with fact-based reporting.

**34 Influences of Advertisers:** Editors and broadcast managers should guard against attempts made by advertisers to unduly influence editorial content. The editorial staff reserves the right to make all decisions about any editorial coverage an advertiser may receive, including advertising supplements. Readers, viewers and listeners should not perceive that an advertiser is getting favorable coverage simply because the advertiser has bought space in the publication or provided broadcast underwriting.

**35 Acceptance of Reader, Listener and Viewer Feedback:** Editors and reporters should invite feedback and participation in their medium. Reaction by the public to what has been published or broadcast should be invited through all methods of communication. Editors and reporters should respond to feedback in a timely matter, less than 24 hours, by returning phone calls, and responding to emails and comments made on the RMSMC website and social media accounts.

**36 Contacting family, friends following serious injuries or deaths: RMSMC** journalists must exercise special care when covering news that involves the serious injury or death of a student, faculty, staff, or a local resident. Coverage should generally focus on verified and official sources (e.g., police, coroner, fire department, sheriff, Colorado State Patrol, federal or state park officials, or similar sources). When appropriate, the journalist may very sensitively ask the family and friends, without exerting pressure, if they would like to honor the deceased or seriously injured person by telling her or his story for publication or broadcast. In all cases, the journalist should not contact either family or friends more than once and, if the source or sources decline comment, the journalist must respectfully disengage from further conversations, emails, or other forms of contact in order to avoid the perception of undue pressure or insensitivity at a time of tragedy for family and friends.

**37 Reporter's Checklist:** Through all steps in the reporting process, from conceptualizing the story assignment, through information gathering and pre-writing, to writing, editing and final publication or broadcasting, a reporter must answer these questions:

1. Why am I reporting the story?
2. Is the story fair?
3. Have I attempted to report all angles?



4. Who will the story affect?

5. Can I defend my decision to report the story?

Often, a reporter consults with an adviser, editor or manager regarding these questions, especially if the answers are troublesome.

**38 Suicide coverage:** Covering suicide carefully, even briefly, can change public misperceptions and correct myths, which can encourage those who are vulnerable or at risk to seek help. Research studies have found that certain types of news coverage can increase the likelihood of suicide in vulnerable individuals. The magnitude of the increase is related to the amount, duration, and prominence of coverage. Risk of additional suicides increases when the story explicitly describes the suicide method, uses dramatic/graphic headlines or images, and repeated/extensive coverage sensationalizes or glamorizes a death. (Based in large part on content provided by *ReportingonSuicide.org*. A specific list of coverage dos and don'ts can be found at <http://reportingonsuicide.org/recommendations/>)