

The Davidsonian Code of Ethics

Preamble

As a major source of information on campus, *The Davidsonian* provides a valuable service to the Davidson College community. With this role comes significant responsibilities. Reports, editors, and all other involved in *The Davidsonian* must maintain a high set of ethical standards, guided by clear values. The following establishes a foundation for ethical decision-making based on the four cardinal principles of the Society of Professional Journalists: to seek truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently, and be accountable. It is only with a defined set of principles that *The Davidsonian* can maintain its reputation as a credible publication.

Seek Truth and Report It

Ensure the accuracy of your information.

Investigate all sides of a story, remembering that your job as a journalist is to provide fair, accurate, and responsible coverage of the story.

Never alter quotations. Paraphrase with attribution if you are not certain of the accuracy of a particular quotation.

Never plagiarize. Representing another's work as your own is inexcusable.

Always question the newsworthiness of a story, taking particular note of the impact individual biases can have. If you have any concerns, consult your editor(s).

Try repeatedly to contact unresponsive sources and offer them a chance to present their information or depiction of events.

When interviewing sources, use the most open communication possible. Face-to-face meetings are the preferred method. Phone interviews are preferred to email when practicable. Unless an interview is face-to-face, the article must indicate the means of communication between a reporter and a source.

Make your position as a journalist clear prior to conducting an interview.

Recognize the difference between information obtained "on the record" and "off the record." Clarify the terms on which information is being given by a source.

Never promise anonymity to a source before discovering his/her motivations. Make clear at the beginning of an interview that top editors will be made aware of his/her identity, regardless of anonymity.

Anonymous sources may be used only 1) when requested by the source and 2) when an editor feels a genuine threat of repercussion exists against the source if they are linked in print to a quotation or position. Examples of repercussions include but are not limited to criminal or Code of Responsibility charges against a student breaking the law or professors having their tenure jeopardized. The highest level of disclosure possible (first name only, "an English professor," etc.) without identifying the source should be made. Editors and writers remain bound to report first-hand knowledge of Honor Code violations to the Dean of Students.

Remember that accountability for each and every anonymous quotation and its content falls not on the source, but on *The Davidsonian* and its credibility.

Credit all contributing writers of the story—whether they have contacted sources for comment or reviewed archived materials for the article's background—in print. This is not just a matter of fairness to their hard work, but a means of ensuring accountability.

Never tamper with or alter photos.
Seek diversity of all kinds within the paper's staff. This will ensure richer breadth and depth of coverage.
Remember that the values expressed in the Honor Code always apply to our work with *The Davidsonian*.

Minimize Harm

Show good taste. The newspaper is the result of a series of judgments. Our determination of certain stories as "newsworthy" and our presentation of the information affect our reputation.

Recognize the implications a story can have on sources, the College, readers, and the reputation of *The Davidsonian*. Editors must realize that unethical practices today can affect the newspaper's ability to report tomorrow. Writers should report all concerns about the impact of a story to their editor(s).

Confirm quotations and information that may seem factually inaccurate with a credible source.

Be cautious of stereotyping. Use information on a person's gender, race, ethnicity, religious background, or sexual orientation only when that information is pertinent to the story. Strive for diversity in sources.

Act Independently

Avoid putting yourself in a situation of real or perceived conflict of interest. This code can neither fully outline nor draw a line for when a conflict of interest exists. Together with your editor(s), decide on a course of action.

Discuss any potential conflicts of interest with your editor(s).

Refrain from reporting on organizations, events, and individuals you are associated with and feel you may have some bias toward.

Maintain open communication with your editor(s) about any ethical issues that may arise.

Be Accountable

Encourage public discourse about journalistic conduct.

Acknowledge mistakes and run expedient corrections.

Keep open lines of communication with readership.

Take prompt disciplinary action, including suspension or termination, for unethical behavior.

Always recognize the importance of maintaining the credibility and reputation of *The Davidsonian*. The newspaper is a trust to be bestowed to future generations of Davidson editors, writers, and students.