



St. Thomas
UNIVERSITY

**Code of Ethics
Journalism Program**

July 2022

CODE OF ETHICS*

Journalism Program, St. Thomas University

PREAMBLE

Student journalists and journalism professors at St. Thomas University must follow the fundamental principles of Accuracy, Fairness, Right to Privacy, Independence, Transparency, and Accountability as they are presented in the Ethics Guidelines of the Canadian Association of Journalists (caj.ca). They must also act in a manner that is consistent with the standards and obligations outlined in *The Mission Statement of the University*, *The Statement of Mutual Academic Expectations of Instructors and Students*, and the *Collective Agreement*. The journalism program is unique among the University's academic departments in that its work does not fall under the purview of the Research Ethics Board. However, journalism professors and journalism students are no different from their counterparts in other programs; they have no entitlement or special authority to disregard criminal or civil laws, legitimate regulations and security procedures.

Journalism students may enter unrestricted public areas without permission to report stories. However, professors should inform the Dean of Humanities or Vice-President (Academic & Research) before they approve any journalistic assignment that would violate any of the laws and regulations that are followed in airports, schools, health care facilities, courts of law, government offices or private spaces in which public access is monitored. Furthermore, St. Thomas University is committed to fostering positive and constructive relations with First Nations communities. Thus, in the spirit of the TRC's Calls to Action, students and professors should educate themselves on protocols and best practices for journalists wishing to enter Indigenous communities in pursuit of a journalistic assignment. (See for instance, the "Journalist's Tool Kit" on the "Reconciliation and the Media" website <https://www.reconciliationandthemediac.ca/journalist-s-tool-kit>).

Accuracy is the moral imperative of journalists and news organizations and should not be compromised by the relentless pressure of deadlines or the professional competition to be 'first with the story.' Journalists must respect the rights of people involved in the news. They must also avoid stereotypes relating to Indigenous status, race, sex, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status. They must take special care when reporting on children or those who are otherwise unable to give consent to be interviewed. They must not allow their biases to impede fair and accurate reporting and must not manipulate people who are thrust into the spotlight because they are victims of crime or are associated with a tragedy. Nor should they indulge in voyeuristic stories. Journalists serve democracy and the public interest by reporting the truth. Defending the public's interest includes promoting the free flow of information, exposing wrongdoing, protecting public health and safety, and preventing the public from being misled. Journalists are accountable to the public for the fairness and reliability of their reporting. They serve the

* This Code of Ethics does not apply to the Communications and Public Policy Program, which is guided by the University's Research Ethics Board policies. The Journalism Program acknowledges the policies of the journalism schools at the University of King's College, Carleton University and Columbia University, as well as the CAJ Ethical Guidelines and the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics. We are also grateful to Dr. Kim Kierans, Professor of Journalism at the University of King's College, for her recommendations to improve this document, and Dr. Stephen Ward for his indirect contribution through his proposed "Ethical Guidelines for the Department of Journalism and Communications" submitted to STU in September 2016.

public interest, and put the needs of audiences – readers, listeners or viewers – at the forefront of newsgathering decisions.

As a Student in the Journalism Program, you pledge to abide by the following core principles of journalism ethics. Moreover, as a journalism student you are, like all your peers at St. Thomas University, bound by the Codes of Student Conduct of the University. (See the *University Calendar*, Section Seven: Regulations, Subsection D. Codes of Student Conduct).

CORE PRINCIPLES

- The journalist's mandate calls for the highest degree of ethical behaviour and professionalism both out on assignment and in the classroom/studio.
- Your journalism must be accurate, reliable and fair.
- You must never plagiarize. Attribute work that is not your own. When in doubt, credit your source. (See the *University Calendar*, Section Seven: Regulations, Subsection D. Codes of Student Conduct; Academic Misconduct; Plagiarism.)
- Your first obligation is to the public and the public good.

While this document addresses primarily the ethical responsibilities of student journalists, journalism professors also have duties and responsibilities which derive from their positions as teachers and mentors. All journalism professors shall abide by the following:

Duty of appropriate supervision:

The Instructor's responsibility to disseminate knowledge "through effective teaching" (article 4.01.2 of the Full-Time Collective Agreement) implies that assignments should be appropriate to the students' level of experience and skill. Instructors should ensure that students are aware of all potential legal and ethical problems in all their assignments. Instructors have a duty to fairly address all concerns that students may have about a project or a story and should not demand that students complete assignments that they consider potentially harmful to themselves or others.

Duty to publicly credit students:

Journalism instructors should be generous and public in giving credit to any work by their students—research or actual writing—that is incorporated into the instructors' publications. To fail to do so amounts to plagiarism and exploitation. Giving full credit is especially important for instructor publications that attract public attention and/or are candidates for journalism awards.

OPERATING ETHICS PRINCIPLES FOR STUDENT JOURNALISTS

A-Safety first

You should not go anywhere you think may be unsafe. On assignment, you should let others know where you are going and when you are expected to return. You should avoid interviews in hotel rooms and non-public spaces. You have the right to raise concerns about whether an assignment will put you at physical or emotional risk. Should you think that you have been asked to complete an assignment that is unsafe, or that violates this Code of Ethics, you should raise the issue with your instructor. For such issues, you should follow the procedures itemized under Section Seven, subsection F "Academic Appeal Procedures" of the *University Calendar*, especially subsection "Other Academic Appeals".

B- Getting the story

Always identify yourself as a journalism student on a class assignment and inform your source *you will publish the story if possible*. Do not gather information on the basis that your stories won't be published. Rare exceptions may be made for investigative stories, but only with your instructor's approval. Do not lie or mislead a source about the nature of the topic to obtain an interview unless it is an investigative story and you have your instructor's approval. Don't take advantage of the naivete or vulnerability of people who haven't been interviewed before. Inform them about the subject. When interviewing minors, seek permission from their parents or their custodians if the subject is of a serious nature. Be aware that, from the perspective of the court, minors are not considered legally capable of providing *fully informed* consent.

Be sensitive to your personal biases. Avoid stereotypes and references to a group or person's Indigenous status, race, colour, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender self-identification, disability, physical appearance or social status, except if this information is crucial to the story. Tell sources how the interview may be used, but do not provide questions in advance. Never give a source control over other interviews or allow them to see or hear stories in advance. Don't stage or recreate events. Don't prompt subjects to wave signs or feign emotion. Don't ask friends to voice quotes you need. Don't fake audio, video or photos. You may crop or digitally enhance photos, but never alter the subject's appearance, including skin colour. Do not remove or add anything to photos.

C- Using sources

News tips from friends/family are valuable, but you should not write them into stories without the instructor's approval. Do your own research, use original sources and verify second-hand information. Do not surreptitiously tape or video a source *for broadcast* — unless approved by your instructor as undercover work. However, you may freely record/video any public or media event without seeking permission. You *should* record interviews even when not for broadcast, and as a courtesy explain to your source you are doing so for accuracy *only*. You may also record phone interviews *without* permission, again for accuracy, but not for broadcast. If taped interviews are for broadcast be sure to explain and obtain agreement from the source. Ensure quotes are accurate and fairly reflect the speaker's views. Quotes may be altered to correct grammar or avoid dialect that would make the speaker look foolish, unless that is your intention. Ellipses may be used for brevity, but not to alter the meaning of the original statement. Always aim to name sources in your stories. Anonymous sources may only be used with the instructor's permission, but the sources must agree their names be given to the instructor. Where privacy of a source is an issue, you must weigh an individual's rights against the public's need for information. Use "common sense, humanity and relevance." (CAJ Ethical Guidelines 2011). Keep promises made to your sources. *Always ask* if off-the-record information may be checked with other sources to get it on the record.

Always explain to sources exactly what is meant by:

- "not for attribution" (use the information, *including non-specific information* about the source)
- "background" (use the information under conditions negotiated with the source)
- "deep background" (use the information without any attribution)
- "off the record" (information cannot be published)

Navigating conflicts of interest:

Do not abuse your role for personal gain, or that of friends/family by requesting or accepting favors, fees, free travel or special treatment from a source. Don't accept gifts exceeding \$15. Free tickets/books constitute access *only if you are covering the event or author*. Do not pay for interviews, do favors or give gifts to sources.

Avoid wearing advocacy buttons or paraphernalia when reporting.

You may not write or edit stories in which you are personally involved with the exception of first-person stories.

Journalists have all rights of citizenship, including voting. However, as journalists we must not exercise our rights in a partisan way; we do not cover, write or edit anything directly connected to a private involvement such as volunteer work, serving on a board or external employment. Notify your instructor if you face a conflict of interest – or perceived conflict – as a private citizen.

Editorial standards:

The STU Journalism program uses *The Canadian Press Stylebook* 18th edition (2018), as well as the *CBC's Journalistic Standards and Practices* (<http://www.cbc.radio-canada.ca/en/reporting-to-canadians/acts-and-policies/programming/journalism/>) The use of obscene language and graphic content can sometimes be acceptable if it is essential to convey the gravity of a situation. It should never be gratuitous or used for sensationalist purposes. When in doubt, consult your instructor.

A- Following publication

Keep proper notes. Retain all your notes and materials. Admit, apologize, and correct errors immediately, informing the audience about the nature of the mistake. News outlets generally do not “unpublish” articles. Rare exceptions generally involve matters of public safety, an egregious error or ethical violation, or legal restrictions, such as publication bans.

B- Social media

Ethical principles apply to all media. Online content, including blogging, and content posted to social media, should be as carefully considered as traditional journalistic material. Journalists do not publish rumours and gossip on any platform. The need for speed should never compromise accuracy, credibility or fairness.

C- Legal considerations

Before you offer a source confidentiality be aware journalists have only limited legal privilege when it comes to source protection. You can be cited for contempt — a criminal offence — for honouring a commitment of confidentiality. It is more prudent to offer *qualified* confidentiality: you would reveal a source's identity only if compelled to testify in court after investigators have exhausted all other potential sources of information or testimony. In your reporting, be mindful of defamation (or libel), that is, an unfair or unjustified statement that injures the reputation of individuals and companies. Simply put, a defamatory statement is a false or unsubstantiated statement “you would not like to see said in public about yourself” (Media scholar Robert Martin).

D – New Brunswick Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (RTIPPA) – Part 3 Protection of Privacy

In addition to the Department of Journalism and professional standards, Part 3 of [New Brunswick's RTIPPA](#) speaks to the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information along with information practices.