

# TU suggests Collegian investigation may result in disciplinary action against journalists

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**Collegian editors Kyle Walker and Conor Fellin have been told by university officials that they could face disciplinary charges for reporting on the suspension of George “Trey” Barnett.**

**Kyle Walker**  
*Editor-in-Chief*

The Collegian’s Managing Editor Conor Fellin and I have been told that the university might bring disciplinary charges against us for certain aspects of the above story, “TU suspended student without hearing, failed to present evidence to the accused.”

Since early in the semester, the Collegian has been investigating the suspension of George “Trey” Barnett. After speaking with us on Jan. 19, Barnett provided us with a number of documents related to his suspension.

Those documents show that Barnett was suspended without a hearing for allegedly harassing posts that a third party made on his Facebook page.

The next day, we contacted University Relations to request an interview with Senior Vice Provost Winona Tanaka, since she was the author of the decision in Barnett’s case.

This interview was never granted, and the school never commented on the veracity of the documents.

On Jan. 21, I met with Mona Chamberlin, Director of Marketing and Communications, to discuss questions we had regarding Barnett’s suspension. I discussed with Chamberlin each of the documents Barnett shared with us.

The day after this meeting, we sent a list of questions to Tanaka through Chamberlin, as the university will usually respond only to questions submitted through Chamberlin’s office.

On Jan. 23, I received a call from the Collegian’s advisor Dan Bewley. He told me that he had spoken with Chamberlin by phone that morning. According to Bewley, the school expressed a concern that the Collegian would cross a line in our investigation and that this could result in some sort of university action.

I immediately contacted Chamberlin to arrange a second meeting, which took place later that day. Conor Fellin, Dan Bewley and I were each present. We made a recording of this meeting.

At the meeting, Chamberlin outlined the administration’s concerns. We were told that the school would not answer any questions and that unspecified pieces of information in our possession were confidential. If “anything that the university deems to be confidential” is “published or shared, (that) could violate university policies,” Chamberlin said.

“If this has already been shared, and I don’t know what you have shared with Conor or what you have shared as a staff,” Chamberlin said, “that constitutes disseminating this information.”

When pressed on the nature of this confidentiality, Chamberlin did not elaborate. The school never told us what information it deems confidential.

Despite multiple requests, the school never provided a highlighted copy of TU disciplinary policies showing the provisions we would violate by publishing “confidential” information.

Chamberlin additionally advised us to consult legal counsel. After the meeting, we contacted the Student Press Law Center (SPLC), a non-profit that supports freedom of the press on college campuses and provides legal counsel for student journalists.

SPLC contacted the university’s lawyer on Jan. 28. According to our contact at SPLC, it is TU’s position that connecting the Facebook posts on Barnett’s page with his suspension is an invasion of the privacy of the disciplinary process, and thus a violation of university policy.

In accordance with advice from the SPLC, we proceeded to write the story. At press time, it was not clear what course of action the university would take.