



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
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MATT BENNETT
VICE PRESIDENT AND
CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

January 9, 2023

Ms. Anne Marie Tamburro
Program Officer, Campus Rights Advocacy
Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression
510 Walnut Street, Suite 1520
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Ms. Tamburro,

Thank you for your December 19 letter regarding student media at American University. President Burwell asked me to respond to you. As chief communications officer, I am responsible for the university's media engagement, including with student journalists.

We agree that freedom of expression and journalism are important to civic discourse. They are also fundamental elements of our educational mission.¹ To provide our student journalists with equitable access and timely engagement with university personnel and information, we have structures and processes that help their requests move efficiently through our large and complex community.

The student media request form facilitates access for all American University student media organizations and helps us effectively organize and respond to inquiries. It also provides data to inform our work for ongoing improvement. After assessing our engagement with student media during the 2021-2022 academic year, during which we received 130 requests from student journalists, we developed the request form to manage the volume of inquiries, support thorough responses to the students, and offer a streamlined interface that enabled us to better identify, obtain, and share the information sought by student journalists.

We respond to all student media inquiries in a timely manner. For example, from August 1, 2022, to December 7, 2022, University Communications and Marketing (UCM) received 58 requests student media requests, the majority through the form. All 58 received a thorough response, which featured statements, interviews, informational resources such as university policies and external reports, or briefings with subject matter experts depending on the topic.

¹ Our faculty include former reporters, including those who advise student media organizations; students from our School of Communication were part of *The Washington Post* Pulitzer Prize winning team last year; we partner on experiential learning opportunities with media organizations including *Politico* and ESPN; and American University holds the license for WAMU, Washington DC's NPR station. Last year, a group of faculty and staff led a campus-wide effort to update our Freedom of Expression policy and values statement to reinforce our commitment and to outline the important responsibilities we all share as members of this community.



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Many requests featured follow-up questions from the student journalists, all of which were addressed. Of the 58 requests, student media organizations published 28 stories, with 30 requests not resulting in any publication. Accurate record keeping supported by the request form enables us to be responsive to student journalists, manage deadlines, organize and deploy university resources, and support campus partners who are contributing to the responses.

Faculty and staff across campus regularly engage with student journalists. Frequently, when student journalists contact faculty or staff directly, they refer the request to UCM to help facilitate the interaction. Our faculty and staff have full-time responsibilities supporting and educating our students and look to UCM to help understand the nature of requests and coordinate logistics. Often, student journalists want to speak to the same group of campus subject matter experts on multiple occasions and topics. The orderly process coordinated by UCM ensures that the students receive timely responses and that the faculty and staff can effectively participate with student journalists while concurrently fulfilling all their responsibilities.

We are committed to supporting and educating our student journalists. I hope this information addresses your concerns and illustrates our extensive constructive engagement with student media.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Matt Bennett'.

Matt Bennett
Vice President and Chief Communications Officer
American University