

MARQUETTE WIRE

ETHICS CODE

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Preamble

The Marquette Wire is dedicated to serving all members of the Marquette University community through its reporting across platforms. To do this, members of our organization demonstrate an unwavering commitment to gathering facts about issues that impact people. It is important to us that those facts are accurate, truthful and provide necessary context for stories.

Our staff members have in-depth discussions about our ethical and moral responsibilities as journalists. We strive to make thoughtful decisions about every story we publish. It is only by representing ourselves in an honorable way that we can earn the trust of our readers, listeners and viewers. While our reporting may uncover injustices or wrongdoings in the community, it is done with care for the betterment of society. The leaders of our organization are always open to constructive feedback from those we serve.

The journalists in our organization work to ensure that stories are pursued and executed with the goal of objectivity. While we understand the inevitable existence of personal bias, we work to guard against its presence in our reporting through editing and fact-checking. We believe that effective reporting must be done with the simple intent of informing people about what is happening in their community.

We have a duty to be transparent with the community about our guiding principles. For this reason, the Marquette Wire constructed an ethics code outlining our general reporting practices. It was constructed by the student executive director of the Marquette Wire with collaborative input from student executives and the faculty director of student media. Members of the Board of Student Media, which includes a variety of faculty members, Marquette students and local professionals in the media industry, shared feedback based on their experience and expertise. The code will be updated as necessary by incoming student leaders.

The guidelines set forth in this ethics code are guiding principles, not binding rules. It is our hope and intention that this ethics code will guide and inform every decision we make, but there may be instances when we must deviate from the general statements in this code. Each story and situation is evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Similarly, this ethics code does not encompass every ethical situation our journalists may encounter. Our journalists are always encouraged to have conversations with members of the Marquette Wire leadership team about their reporting endeavors.

This code applies to all paid Marquette Wire staff members, aside from MUTV production staff members, who serve in technical roles and play no role in editorial content decisions. The staff members who uphold this code include editors, reporters, designers, photographers and multimedia content producers, among others. These staff members are expected to familiarize themselves with this code. Leaders in our organization will provide staff members with any necessary training and accessible copies of this code.

Telling the truth

- Be honest, accurate, truthful and fair. Do not distort or fabricate facts, imagery, sound or data.
- Provide accurate context for all reporting.
- Seek out diverse voices that can contribute important perspectives on the subject you're writing. Ensure that sources are reliable. To the maximum extent possible, make clear to your audience who and what your sources are, what motivations your sources may have and any conditions people have set for giving you information. When unsure of information, leave it out or make clear it has not been corroborated.
- Correct errors quickly, completely and visibly. Make it easy for your audience to bring errors to your attention.
- If a report includes criticism of people or organizations, give them ample opportunity to respond.
- Clearly distinguish fact from opinion in all content.
- We recognize that our journalists help set the agenda for our community, and we take that responsibility seriously.

Conflicts of interest

- Avoid any conflict of interest that undermines your ability to report fairly. Disclose to your audience any unavoidable conflicts or other situational factors that may validly affect their judgment of your credibility.
- Do not skew or compromise your reporting.
- Do not allow the interests of advertisers or others funding your work to affect the integrity of your journalism.
- Our journalists should immediately disclose to a supervisor any investments or other interests they have in a company or organization they are asked to cover. Supervisors should put another journalist on the story.

Community

- Respect your audience and those you write about. Consider how your work and its permanence may affect the subjects of your reporting, your community and — since the Internet knows no boundaries — the larger world.

Professional conduct

- Don't plagiarize or violate copyrights.
- Keep promises to sources, readers and the community.
- Our journalists should remain neutral observers at events they cover.
- Members of our organization should conduct themselves in a polite and respectful manner in the community.

Journalist safety

- Our journalists should consider personal safety when covering any story, but in particular stories that might be potentially dangerous.
- Our journalists must maintain close communication with leaders of our organization when they are covering potentially dangerous events or stories.
- As an organization, we will not send a reporter alone into an unsafe environment for the sake of a story.
- Managers trust that our field staff makes the sole determination of safety in a particular situation, and the field staff makes the decision whether they should leave if they feel unsafe.

Nature of our journalism

- Our journalists should work to ensure that stories are neutral, and be diligent in attempts to remove any possible personal bias in stories. Exceptions are made for journalists whose jobs specifically involve expressing opinions, such as editorial writers, columnists, commentators and cartoonists.
- We encourage our journalists to respectfully express opinions about journalism matters, advocating for freedom of information and joining the conversation within the profession about important issues.
- Our journalists, salespeople and executives work to ensure that advertisers, sponsors and contributors have no influence over editorial content.
- Our journalists may not serve in public relations roles for campus or community organizations. Our MUTV production staff may serve in these roles, considering these individuals have no role in content or editorial decisions.
- Occasionally, our journalists may have to report on events sponsored by our organization. We will cover the events by providing factual coverage in a neutral voice and will disclose our affiliation for transparency reasons.
- We understand that in an educational setting, some students desire to get involved in campus and community organizations, such as fraternities, sororities or other groups. Our journalists, however, must avoid political involvement such as running for or holding office, joining political parties, volunteering in campaigns, donating to campaigns, or displaying campaign materials on their property or persons, or signing petitions. This is not limited to on campus political involvement; it also includes off campus political involvement.
- We expect that journalists will tell their supervisors about their community involvement.
- When journalists have to cover an area where they have a personal involvement, we will assign another journalist. If a conflict can't be avoided, coverage should disclose the conflict.

Bombs and other threats

- We view bomb threats in any Marquette campus or Marquette affiliated property as newsworthy and may report them as quickly as possible. Simultaneously we will consult with local officials to determine whether the threat is credible, but reserve the right to publish regardless of what officials say.

Concealing identity

- We permit undercover reporting only when managers feel a story is important enough to justify doing so, and we have exhausted all other reasonable methods to get the story.
- In the rare instances when undercover reporting methods should be considered, the issue must be discussed and approved by the manager of the publication and the executive director of the Marquette Wire, who will consider the ethical and legal ramifications of the matter.

Confidential sources

- We will disclose to readers or viewers the reasons for granting confidentiality, such as fear for the source's safety or job, when we use unnamed sources.
- We use confidential sources sparingly to provide important information that cannot be obtained through on-the-record sources. Confidential sources must be in a direct position to know the information they provide, and we must attempt to corroborate the information given through other sources. Reporters must disclose the identity of unnamed sources (verbally, not through e-mail or other electronic means) to the manager of the publication and executive director, who must approve the use of an anonymous source.

Children: Coverage, images and interviews

- In this section, children refers to people aged 16 and younger.
- We identify children who are charged with a crime only if the child is being tried in adult court.
- We consider granting confidentiality if we're covering a story about a sensitive issue that could cause a child to be stereotyped, judged unfairly or put in harm's way, even if the child doesn't request it.
- We avoid identifying -- by name or photo -- children who are connected with a crime as victims or witnesses.
- In our setting, we treat any Marquette student aged 17 or older as an adult.
- Our journalists should seek permission from a parent when interviewing, photographing or video or audio recording a child. When obtaining permission is not possible or practical, the journalist should discuss the situation with a manager.
- In breaking news situations, where getting permission is impractical, we do not require parental permission to photograph or interview children.

Crime scene situations

- We will take authorities' recommendations into account but use our own judgment.
- Special care must be exercised when covering active crime scenes live; we should be particularly mindful that our live video does not indicate police location, movement or strategies.
- Reporters must be in constant communication with editors when covering active crime scenes.

Interviewing

- Our organization never pays for interviews.
- In rare situations, our organization might provide interviewees with selected quotes from an interview dealing with a sensitive topic in advance of publication, but any such practice must be approved on a case-by-case basis by a manager. This can include instances when interviewees are not used to being covered by the media, or when media coverage may make interviewees vulnerable to intense scrutiny.
- Our organization may provide selected quotes or information from an interview in advance of publication for fact-checking purposes. This helps us ensure that we are not missing key information in our coverage.
- By providing sources with material in advance of publication, our organization will not permit sources to alter quotes or information they provided to our journalists, nor do they have veto power.
- Our organization may provide sources with a general idea of the topic of interview questions in advance. If the topic requires specific data-gathering or complicated information, we may provide some specific questions in advance.
- We strive to conduct in-person interviews rather than rely on email interviews.
- Before every interview, our journalists should be certain an interview subject understands the conversation is on the record. If the source does not agree to go on the record, the journalist may not attribute off-the-record material to the source, but the journalist may do their own research to verify the information another way.

Sources: Reliability and attribution

- We use links, if available, in addition to source attribution in online stories.
- We consistently include clear attributions throughout a story, even if something has been established as fact.
- Conflicts of interest by sources should be avoided at all costs. However, in certain stories, we may use sources with a conflict of interest, but must disclose the conflict of interest (e.g. a scientist who conducted a study about a drug's effectiveness when the study was funded by the manufacturer).
- As a general rule, we do not allow conflicts of interest between reporters and sources. Reporters are not permitted to use sources who are their roommates, significant others, friends, family members, colleagues and the like.

Accuracy

- Our staff members should take reasonable steps to ensure the accuracy of information that we publish and note our sources.
- We should not publish rumors or other information we have not verified.
- Reporters should fact-check before publication and, in some cases, may be permitted to preview sections of the actual text of a story with a source connected to that story. Reporters should receive approval from the manager of the publication and executive director before doing so.
- Unpublished photos and video, as well as reporter notes, should never be released to anyone. We may consider granting a request if police are seeking unpublished video or photos to solve a crime, but only upon discussion with and approval from the student executive director and the director of student media.
- Reporters are encouraged to record all interviews and events whenever possible, and are encouraged to ask permission to do so.
- If a source is recording an interview, reporters are required to record the interview for our organization's record-keeping purposes.

Balance and fairness

- If one perspective on an issue has been credibly established as fact, we will give greater weight to that perspective in our stories than others that are less supported by factual evidence.
- If an assertion made by a source in our stories is proven false, we will provide the evidence that contradicts the falsehood.
- In breaking news situations, we will attempt to gather comments from key sides of an issue; if comments are not immediately available, we will publish or air the story without them, make clear that we were unable to get some comment and update our story as needed. We will strive to include past comments by sources that may be relevant to the current issue.
- We believe in covering not only the most powerful voices on an issue, but also those who are not normally heard.

Online commenting

- The executive director reviews every comment by every commenter and decides whether a comment should be made public.
- We do not permit anonymous comments.
- We generally permit comments on all articles, except in cases where an article involves a sensitive death.
- We do not permit comments that are deemed sexist, racist, homophobic, discriminatory, derogatory, lurid, untruthful or hateful.
- We require commenters to use their full and complete names and to give us their email addresses. We may attempt to contact a registered commenter in some situations, such as if the commenter raises legitimate concerns about our reporting, states they are affected by the issue in a way that could potentially lead to a follow-up story or is attempting to contact us with other questions or information.

Quotations

- We may under certain circumstances clean up random utterances such as pauses, “um” or “you know” unless they materially alter the meaning.
- We will allow separate phrases of a quote separated by ellipsis (“I will go to war ... but only if necessary,” the president said.) as long as the ellipsis does not alter the accuracy of the quote.
- We will allow separate phrases of a quote separated by attribution. (“I will go to war,” the president said. “But only if necessary.”)
- Reporters will add segments in parentheses to direct quotes ONLY if the word(s) included in parentheses clarify the quote for the reader’s understanding. This should be done sparingly and only when absolutely necessary.
- Our journalists will strive to provide necessary context for every quote.

Withholding names

- We do not publish names of sexual assault victims unless they agree to speak on the record.
- In breaking news stories, we do not publish the names of fatalities until authorities have notified their families and released the names, unless compelling circumstances justify publication and we have verified the names.
- We should always be careful about identifying kidnap victims because the person may be in danger.
- In covering active police or military operations, we will withhold such details as location or tactics planned, until after the operation, to avoid endangering police, troops or civilians who could be affected.
- We will consider potential harm to sources before naming them in stories.
- We will release the names of mass killers, but will strive to not make the killer the focus of our coverage in order to deny them any attention they may seek. We may explore any systems and factors that may have contributed to the killer’s actions.
- Leaders in our organization will have in-depth discussions about decisions on coverage related to mass killings.

Community activities

- Our journalists should avoid community involvement in areas that they cover. Journalists should tell their supervisors about their community involvements, including when a story suddenly arises that may present a conflict. When they have to cover an area where they have a personal involvement, we should consider assigning another journalist. If a conflict can’t be avoided, coverage should disclose the conflict.
- Our journalists may not serve in public relations roles for campus or community organizations. Our MUTV production staff may serve in these roles, considering these individuals have no role in content or editorial decisions.

Gifts, free travel and other perks

- Our journalists may accept tickets or press passes to events we are covering or reviewing, but cannot accept extra tickets for family or friends.
- Our journalists who cover events that involve meals or travel (such as on an athletic team’s airplane) should make arrangements in advance to pay a fair price for the value received. If someone is not giving us a price, we should price a commercial coach fare for travel, or a typical meal at the restaurant or hotel.
- Our journalists should disclose any gifts they receive to their supervisors and discuss whether something needs to be returned, disclosed, paid for, donated to charity or handled in some other way that protects our integrity.
- Our journalists should not accept gifts received by mail with a value greater than \$20. In cases of unsolicited books, music or other items sent to our organization in an attempt to generate a review or publicity, journalists may accept the gift but disclose the gift if writing a review.

Plagiarism and attribution

- When we are using someone else's exact words, we should use quotation marks and attribution.
- Attribution should be as specific as possible, including the name of the author and publication or organization of the source we are quoting.
- We should always cite news releases if they are our sources, and should quote them if using their exact words.
- Even when taking basic facts from another source--"World War II ended in Allied victories over Germany and Japan"-- we should vary the wording from the phrasing used in source materials.
- We strive to attribute all sources by name and, if the source is digital, by linking to the original source.

Social networks

- The social media behavior of our journalists impacts the appearance, credibility and trustworthiness of the entire organization.
- Our journalists should not express political beliefs and affiliations, on social media, whether through personal posts or shares, comments, likes and retweets.
- Our journalists should refrain from expressing opinions on current news events and issues.
- Our staff members are permitted to share general opinions about lifestyle topics on their social media accounts, as long as those opinions do not conflict with their coverage responsibilities. These opinions can be shared on topics such as food, social events, non-Marquette related sports and community events.
- Members of the opinions desk may share their political beliefs, affiliations and opinions on social media sites. This exception exists because opinions staff members express their opinions in Wire publications as part of their job responsibilities.
- If opinions staff members choose to share their political beliefs, affiliations and opinions on social media, these staff members are required to do so in a respectful manner.
- If readers wish to engage in discussion with opinions staff members on social media, opinions staff members are expected to maintain professional manners.
- Staff members should share a variety of journalistic content from a variety of publications on their social media accounts as not to appear one-sided.
- Staff members are expected not to make inappropriate posts on social media, which could include the following kinds of posts: racist, discriminatory, derogatory, sexist, homophobic, lurid, untruthful and hateful posts.
- Read more of the Marquette Wire social media policy [here](#).

Awards and contests

- We typically accept awards only from journalistic organizations, with judges who are journalists.
- We will assess the nature of the contest and make a decision consistent with our overall contest principles if we win a contest we did not enter.
- For our non-journalistic endeavors, contests (such as the Golden Mic awards from the Inter-scholastic Broadcasting Association) can be entered with approval from the student executive director.

Corrections

- If a mistake is made in a social media post, we will delete the original post and publish a corrected version with an indication that the new post is a correction.
- We will show all changes that have been made to online stories if they involve corrections or rephrasing to fix unclear material.
- In traditional printed media, we will typically post all corrections in a single corrections area. Online corrections will be made at the bottom of the individual story in question.

Freelance work by employees

- We may permit freelancing by Marquette Wire employees, but they must receive explicit permission to do so from their direct manager and the executive director before undertaking such work.
- If approved, the freelance worker may not use Marquette Wire equipment.
- Wire employees may hold additional jobs or positions on and off campus, but certain activities are prohibited for paid staff. During their time on staff, paid Wire staff members must refrain from all partisan political involvement for the sake of fairness. This includes involvement in Marquette University Student Government, as well as internships, jobs, campaigning, signing petitions or openly donating to a political cause. We also prohibit paid employees from working in paid positions with Marquette Athletics.

Removing archived work

- As a general rule, we will not remove archived stories or material from our website.
- We will correct any errors we learn of in our archived content and note the corrections.
- We will consider exceptions to our policy in extreme cases, such as abuse or danger to someone's personal safety.

Reporting on our organization

- We will assign an internal reporter to cover the story when our organization has done something newsworthy. The story will be edited using our normal procedure, but the student executive director should also be involved in the decision-making and editing process. We will be transparent about our reporting process when a story is about our organization.

Diversity

- We encourage staffers to seek diverse sources, both in specific stories and in routine beat coverage, to add valuable perspectives to stories.
- We believe it is our responsibility to seek diverse pools of candidates for all jobs.
- It is our ethical obligation to accurately represent the communities that we cover.
- We cherish a work environment that is welcoming to all, fostering a broad range of backgrounds and ideas.
- We do not tolerate racist, discriminatory, derogatory, sexist, homophobic, lurid, untruthful or other inappropriate comments in our work environment.

Hate speech

- We report on hate speech and actions and may include original offensive expressions when specifically necessary for audience understanding of the incident.
- It is incumbent upon reporters to recognize sensitive issues involving covering hate speech and seek advice from managers.
- Reporters may publish original offensive expressions only upon discussion and approval of top level managers.

Mental health and suicide

- We will cover mental health and suicide as broad public health issues as consistently as we cover other health matters.
- We will use the phrases “died by suicide” or “killed himself or herself” and avoid the phrases “committed suicide” and “took his or her own life.”
- As a general rule, we will not detail specific means of suicide in news stories or obituaries.
- We should use respectful headlines on stories about suicide.
- As a general rule, we will not use graphic images on stories about suicide.
- We will include contact information for resources for people in mental health crises. (e.g. “The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline in the United States is available 24 hours a day at 800-273-8255.”)

Naming suspects

- As a general rule, we will not name criminal suspects until charges have been filed.
- In very rare circumstances, we may name a suspect before charging, but only in consultation with the student executive director, who makes the final decision.
- We will not name juvenile suspects in criminal cases unless extraordinary circumstances justify the use of their names.
- If a criminal suspect is at large and believed to be dangerous, we will identify the suspect, including a photo or sketch.
- If we publish the name of a person arrested or charged with a crime, we will strive to publish a story about the resolution of the case.

Obscenities

- In print publications, we typically replace obscenities, vulgarities and slurs with something that implies the word rather than stating it directly (e.g. “f---”). In rare occasions, we may use obscenities, vulgarities or slurs in direct quotations if they are essential to the story, and only upon discussion and approval of top level managers.

Privacy

- We will weigh privacy concerns against news value before publishing certain details in stories.
- We use discretion when it comes to interviewing and publishing material from trauma victims or bystanders because we understand that to do so may cause additional harm to individuals. For example, our reporters should use discretion on publishing certain details they gather at the scene of a crime.
- We view every comment on social media and the Internet as fair game for journalists, even for private individuals. We reserve the right to publish whatever relevant comments we find online or from public sources.
- We must seek permission to use photo, audio or video content posted by someone on social media, and we will follow copyright regulations.

Race and gender

- We will use racial, ethnic, gender and sexuality identifiers when specifically germane to a story, and in stories that require descriptions (e.g. a suspect or missing person), but not otherwise.
- We will refer to a source by whichever gender pronoun they identify with or want us to use. In instances where excessive use of pronouns may confuse the reader, we will simply use a source’s name as attribution.
- When identifying a suspect at large, we will be conscious of the ethical obligation to avoid stereotypes. In any written or spoken description, sex (or preferred gender identity) will be the first identifier, followed by race and other details. We will use race in all such descriptions, not only if the person is a minority.
- We should use gender-neutral position titles, such as “spokesperson” rather than “spokesman” and “firefighter” rather than “fireman.” This also includes using “first-year” rather than “freshman.”

Sensational material

- We will consider the differing impact of sensitive material on various segments of the population (e.g., effects on minors, vulnerable groups or victims of crime).
- We will refrain from running sensitive material specifically or solely for revenue purposes, such as increased digital traffic.
- We will discuss and define the specific public value among members of our staff before publishing the material (it’s insufficient to merely say, “it’s in the public interest”).

Audio

- We may under certain circumstances clean up random utterances such as pauses, “um” or “you know” in audio cuts unless they materially alter the meaning.
- We will fully identify speakers in audio cuts unless there is a compelling reason not to.
- Our journalists may never combine sound from different sources in such a way as to deceive people by creating an audio scene that never happened.
- Cuts and programs may be edited and rearranged as needed, as long as the meaning of statements remains the same after editing, and rearrangements of audio do not affect the original meaning.

Data journalism

- We will put all data in relevant context.
- We will make original data available for download when it is not covered by a usage agreement that bars such public posting. Any usage agreement will be disclosed publicly.
- We will not use personally identifiable data without specific and valid news value to support disclosure.
- In general, we are wary of paying for data, as it may be tainted by financial motives. Data collected by journalistic organizations that require a membership, such as the Investigative Reporters & Editors, may be used. Similarly, data collected through an open records request that requires fees may be used.

Photo and video

- When documenting private or traumatic moments, we will not seek permission to shoot, but will be sensitive to subjects’ situation. Our photographers will be respectful and considerate when documenting these moments.
- As an organization, we strive to produce our own video and photo content.
- We will clearly label the source of all “handout” photos or video provided by an outside entity.
- We will use file photos and videos judiciously, recognizing that this content can re-traumatize victims in stories that we covered.
- In cases where re-enactment or posed images for photos or video might be necessary to explain something that happened, we will clearly label the photo or video as a reenactment.
- Generally, our journalists will refrain from becoming an active participant in a news story (e.g. taking part in a rescue operation or using our camera to influence a situation).
- We will edit images only if doing so doesn’t affect the news content of the image or the meaning viewers will make from it.
- We will obscure or pixellate images when the intent is to protect the identity of someone in the image or to protect viewers from gory or graphic material.
- Leaders in our organization will have discussions about sensitive images. They will seek advice and approval from top-level managers before publishing this material.
- As a general rule, our photos should be captioned with accurate information.

User-generated content

- We may accept content created and sent to us by members of the community, but when we do so we will strive to make sure it meets our journalistic standards.
- We will seek explicit permission from members of the community to publish content they created.
- We recognize that we do not own the rights to distribute user-generated content to other media organizations.

Donor interests

- Our funder(s) will not be able to see our stories before publication.
- Our funder(s) will have no say in topics to be covered or specific stories.
- Our funder(s) will not be used as sources in stories they fund.
- When absolutely necessary, we will disclose funders’ involvement in a program they support, such as programs that fund journalistic projects without determining the content.

Clickbait and metrics

- We will accurately reflect the content of stories in headlines, custom excerpts and social media posts.
- We may use metric considerations as one of a number of factors in determining what we cover and how we place stories. Our primary determination is based on journalistic standards.

Contact us

Readers, viewers and listeners can contact the Marquette Wire student executive director with questions, comments, concerns or feedback at 414-288-1739.