

Columbia Journalism School Policy Concerning Philanthropic Donations to Support Journalism and Research Projects

May 2017

Principles

In May 1904, Joseph Pulitzer, the founder of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, published an essay about his “founding idea.” He argued that journalism should evolve into a profession informed by public spiritedness and independence. “Above knowledge,” Pulitzer wrote, “above news, above intelligence, the heart and soul of a paper lie in its moral sense, in its courage, its integrity, its humanity, its sympathy for the oppressed, its independence, its devotion to the public welfare, its anxiety to render public service.” Absent such principles, he added, the country might have “smart journalists,” but not “truly great or honorable ones.”

More than a century later, Columbia Journalism School measures itself by these ideals. The purpose of this memo is to outline how such principles apply to the school’s partnerships with philanthropic donors, particularly in cases when those donors fund journalism or research. By “journalism” we mean reporting intended for publication with media partners or independently, following the methodologies and protocols employed by professional journalists. Examples of such work are to be found in the several postgraduate public interest reporting projects in place at the school, as well as in the several cases where donors have contributed to support workshops and classes that may produce journalism with media partners or independently as part of the class. By “research” we refer to white papers, monographs, articles, books and other published work intended to inform journalists and the public about trends, problems and changes in the field, as well as workshops or other events convened to develop such publishing. A rule of thumb is whenever the public encounters journalism or research produced by the school and funded by donors we should make transparent our sources of support.

Scope of This Policy

For decades, Columbia Journalism School has relied upon philanthropic donations to support students, faculty, research and journalism. Some of this philanthropy has provided scholarships to students. Some has allowed the school to recruit new faculty. Some gifts have allowed the school to refurbish its

building or invest in new technologies. Columbia University policies enacted and supervised by the university's trustees make clear the appropriate criteria and mechanisms for accepting such gifts.

This memorandum, adopted by the faculty of Columbia Journalism School, concerns a subset of donations that support journalistic reporting projects and research.

The policies outlined in this memorandum do not apply to philanthropic gifts and grants received by individual faculty members outside of the school – for example, grants to fund a faculty member's documentary film or book project that are not routed through the school. However, faculty members are encouraged to adopt the practices outlined here in such cases.

Columbia University policies designed for peer-reviewed science are not always appropriate for journalism. For the purposes of this memo, Columbia Journalism School incorporates the "code of conduct" of the university's Office of Research Compliance and Training, but only where that code is appropriate to the specific practice of journalism. (In some instances, for example, the protocols of social science research are not appropriate for the methodologies of journalism.) We do explicitly endorse and adopt the office's core principles: "We believe that every person at every level within our organization has an obligation to perform his or her duties with the highest degree of honesty and integrity. Only when this occurs can we ensure that we are meeting our obligations, observing our values and protecting our reputation."

We also incorporate here Columbia University's policies concerning gift management, as outlined by the Office of Alumni and Development and overseen by university trustees. These policies cover subjects such as disclosure, conflict of interest, and review. The policies are updated periodically.

We take note, for example, under these O.A.D. policies, any corporate gift exceeding \$500,000 must be reviewed and approved by a special, university-wide faculty committee. Other policies touch upon the handling of anonymous gifts, the intellectual independence of university research, modalities of communication by donors, and other subjects.

Independence

Faculty, students and postgraduate fellows at Columbia Journalism School must carry out their research independently, free from any influence or control by funders or other interest groups. Such journalism and research should be rooted in evidence and should follow wherever evidence leads.

Journalism and research projects at Columbia should also seek to avoid even the appearance of any compromise of independence. To this end:

--Donors to journalism projects or research at Columbia should not independently communicate with reporters, project leaders or faculty about the work, unless the Dean or the Academic Dean approves.

--Academic leaders or faculty may offer to donors occasional updates about the progress of research, but should never provide prior review of any drafts, reporting or research papers to donors before publication.

--Where donors or officers or donor organizations appear as speakers at Columbia Journalism events, the fact of the speaker's philanthropic contributions to the school should be disclosed.

--In soliciting donations to support journalism and research, Columbia Journalism School should avoid projects with a very narrow focus. The school may seek support for "beats" or "fields" of research or journalism but it should not seek donations for specific stories.

Transparency and Disclosure

Columbia Journalism School will not accept anonymous donations to support journalism or research. All donors to such projects must agree to be listed appropriately on the school's web site and in published work. Disclosure policy in published work is subject to the policies of partner publishers; the School's policy is to list such donors on its web site. The amount of a donor's contribution need not be disclosed but the donor's identity must be disclosed. The Dean and Office of Alumni and Development will determine what form of disclosure is appropriate for particular donors and assure that there is agreement and mutual understanding about such disclosures.

Gifts By Corporations

Columbia Journalism School has long accepted gifts from appropriate corporations to support faculty, scholarships, and research. As noted, corporate gifts above \$500,000 are subject to university-mandated review. In addition, Columbia Journalism School adopts its own review policies for corporate gifts. For any corporate gift above \$50,000 or in any case, no matter the size of the gift, where the Dean identifies an exceptional case of perceived conflict or reputational risk, the Dean will convene an ad hoc panel of three faculty, to solicit comment. After taking this advice, the Dean will consult with the Academic Dean and then take a decision at his or her discretion. The Dean will report back to the faculty at regular intervals about the outcome of these decisions. The faculty may choose from time to time to debate and decide by a full vote of the faculty whether to accept corporate or governmental gifts.

Gifts from Governmental Agencies

Columbia Journalism School encourages faculty members to apply for research grants from federal agencies that support independent academic research at universities. In 2014, the faculty decided to accept research funding from the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the National Institutes of Health. In addition, the Dean approves State Department-funded lecture tours on a case-by-case basis. Faculty who make research applications or who consider government-funded travel should notify the Dean or the Academic Dean in advance. Columbia Journalism School will not accept donations from any government or government agency for the purposes of carrying out reported journalism, as opposed to academic research. Any exception to this policy would require an affirmative vote of the full-time faculty.

Disclosure of This Policy

Once adopted in final form, this policy will be distilled into an executive summary and attached to any gift agreements where the donor is supporting journalism or academic research. A copy of the full policy will also be posted on the school's web site.