



The mission of the Southwestern College Sun is to serve its campuses and their communities by providing information, insights and stimulating discussions of news, activities and topics relevant to our readers. The staff strives to produce a newspaper that is timely, accurate, fair, interesting, visual and accessible to readers. Though The Sun is a student publication, staff members ascribe to the ethical and moral guidelines of professional journalists.

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National College Newspaper Hall of Fame Inducted 2018	San Diego County Multicultural Heritage Award
Student Press Law Center National College Press Freedom Award 2011, 2018	California Newspaper Publishers Association California College Newspaper of the Year 2013, 2016, 2020, 2021, 2023 Student Newspaper General Excellence 2002-25
National Newspaper Association National College Newspaper of the Year 2004-2025	Society of Professional Journalists National Mark of Excellence 2001-24 First Amendment Award 2002, 2005
ACP Pacemaker 100 An Outstanding Student Publication of the Century 2022	San Diego Press Club Excellence in Journalism 1999-2025
Associated Collegiate Press Pacemaker 2003-06, 2008, 2009, 2011-2017, 2019-2025 General Excellence 2001-25 Best of Show 2001-25	Directors Award for Defense of Free Speech 2012
Columbia Scholastic Press Association Gold Crown 2012, 2023, 2025	Journalism Association of Community Colleges Pacesetter Award 2001-18, 2020-25 Newspaper General Excellence 2000-2025
College Media Association National College Newspaper of the Year 2020, 22, 24	American Scholastic Press Association Community College Newspaper of the Year
California College Media Association Outstanding College/University Newspaper	Community Service Award

MEMBERSHIPS



Editorial



CARLA LABTO / THE SWC SUN

Behavior toward student journalists is unprofessional

Having on journalists has become a new national pastime. The current occupant of the White House calls us “the Enemy of the People.” Occupiers of the federal government routinely call us “fake news,” and other less-than-presidential epithets like “ugly,” “piggy,” “stupid,” “fatty,” “lazy” and many other names straight off the elementary school playground. They have sealed off the Pentagon, Treasury and other federal agencies from independent journalists in hopes that no one pays attention to their dangerous shenanigans.

Access Denied. Sadly, unbelievably, the same thing is happening today at Southwestern College. Our once-open, student-friendly college has become increasingly opaque. Stonewalling has become commonplace. Even illegal, unethical attempts at prior restraint are popping up like weeds choking the garden of free speech.

We’re not having it. Student journalists have the same rights and responsibilities as the print and broadcast professionals fighting so hard to maintain our constitutional democracy. We have the right to access public records, public meetings and public employees. (So do all American citizens.) We have the responsibility to serve our diverse and unique borderlands community.

We also, as students, have the reasonable expectation that all college employees are here to help us with our educational goals. Thankfully, many employees embrace that concept from the Southwestern College Mission Statement. Many adhere to the college Value Statements of Equity, Professional Excellence and Student Success. We appreciate those caring faculty and staff that help students with food, clothing, interviews for PD classes, attendance at arts and athletic events, and so much more. The Sun (Journalism 200) is one of our classes. Our academic assign-

ments are to interview and photograph people and events. To all of you who have agreed to interviews, photos and requests for information, mil gracias/ thank you.

Some educators are not helping students doing their classwork. A teenage immigrant on her first ever assignment was treated poorly by coaches and the athletic department and wanted to quit the college newspaper. (We convinced her to stay). A team of students working on a routine story about rats in the college library complex have been stonewalled by librarians and misled by administrators. A student working on a general piece about mental health challenges faced by American college students cannot get counselors to talk with them.

Sorry, we are not having it. Blocking access to sources, demanding questions in advance and conditioning interviews on reviewing the article before publication are unethical and illegal. It is prior restraint. It is contemptuous behavior toward journalists who are doing their jobs. Our adviser will fail us if we provide questions in advance, share work prior to publication or engage in any other unethical behavior. There are a hundred reasons why this is bad practice and we are trying to learn good practices at Southwestern College. No ethical educator would ask a nursing student to give a child the wrong shot, a football player to intentionally allow another player to score or a mariachi trumpeter to break into “All I Want for Christmas is You” when the band is playing “Cielo Lindo.”

Why are some college employees asking us to behave in an unprofessional manner? If our administration believes in education, then it should believe in ours, too.

Student journalists are not sinister political operatives out to get anyone. We are young reporters trying to learn how to serve the public by covering our district. We are your students – first-gen-

eration collegians, working parents, returning adults, immigrants, refugees, pioneers, DREAMERS, groundbreakers—learning about integrity and professional standards from adult role models.

Restricting access does not “protect” our institution, it weakens it. It damages trust. It creates suspicion. It can generate resentment. It undermines confidence. Southwestern College should encourage students to ask questions. A confident administration answers them with honesty and honorable intent. Competent professionals of all stripes should be able to sit down with a young student journalist without prescreening the questions or requiring permission slips.

What lessons are we supposed to take away when our administrators and librarians melt down over rats? Really, it is not that big a deal. Rats happen. Lice happen. Mold happens. Leaks happen. To paraphrase Forrest Gump, “stuff happens.” Just be real about it. Tell us what’s going on and what you are doing about it. Then the story is over. Playing games, being mendacious and hiding things just makes journalists – and the community – suspicious. It makes us want to know why the paranoia and why the stonewall. It makes us feel like we need to do serial stories.

Our experience is that enforced quiet precedes discoveries of corruption, abuse and malfeasance. We are not saying necessarily that is what’s happening at Southwestern, but why the suspicious behavior? If everything is coming up roses, why the stiff arm from leadership?

Southwestern College sits in the middle of a news desert. Too many people seem to believe the old racist diss that nothing good happens south of the I-8. The Union-Tribune has one education reporter, NBC has one South County reporter, the Star News has one reporter... and so forth. The Sun plays an essential role by celebrating the wondrous diversity of Southwestern College and covering its decision makers. That’s our job. We will continue to do it to the best of our abilities.