

## PART TWO: CASE STUDIES OF ETHICAL ISSUES

Use the following cases as needed and wanted to get student's feedback.

1. **A school secretary at the junior high is charged with embezzling \$20,000 from the student activity fund, money used to sponsor class trips and club projects.**
  - Should this story be covered in the school news publication or yearbook?
  - The secretary's son is a student at the high school. Should that influence the decision on whether to cover the story?
  - The secretary's son is also under psychiatric care for depression. What if the staff decides to cover the story, but the principal threatens to censor it because of his concern for the psychological damage the embarrassment could cause the secretary's son, who is totally innocent?
  - Is there any remedy to the dilemma short of censorship?
  
2. **The local Community Club is a hub of town activity, but in its 77-year history, it has never had a woman member. The club promotes community projects and social activities and also has political influence. Knowing that some women would like to join the club, a reporter for the student newspaper wants to interview club officers and find out why no women have ever been admitted as members. The superintendent of schools, a past president of the club, asks the editors to postpone covering the story until after the town votes on a school referendum two months away. He is afraid a controversial story about the club could cause some people to vote against the referendum in retribution.**
  - Should the editors agree to delay coverage?
  - How can they justify their decision?
  - What are the advantages and disadvantages of delaying coverage?
  - What risks do editors take if they go ahead with the story despite the superintendent's request?
  - Should a school newspaper or yearbook cover this kind of community issue?
  
3. **A columnist for the student newspaper said he witnessed the principal physically removing a student (for misconduct) from the stands at a football game. Although the student was obeying the principal's request to get up and leave, the columnist said the principal grabbed the student by the arm, embarrassing him in front of his peers. The columnist writes an opinion piece on the incident, personally attacking the principal for his poor judgment in "manhandling" a student. The principal denies he used physical force.**
  - As editor, do you allow the columnist editorial freedom to personally attack the principal for using poor judgment?
  - To the editor's knowledge, the principal had never before been accused of being physical in administering discipline. Should that fact have any relevancy about how this story should be handled?

- Should the editor require the columnist to “tone down” his article? What could be the advantages and disadvantages of editing the article in a way that would tone down the personal nature of the attacks on the principal?
  - Would other teachers and school staff members feel threatened that if they made a simple mistake, they would be criticized in the newspaper or yearbook?
  - When is criticism of an administrator or teacher justified in the student newspaper or yearbook? When is it not?
4. **Two months after being elected homecoming king, a student is expelled for stealing science equipment.**
- Should this story be covered in the student newspaper?
  - Since expulsion hearings are held in executive session of the board of education and students are not identified to the public by name, how could such a story be covered without the risk of libel?
  - When is the newspaper justified in printing the names of students involved in incidents of discipline or crime?
  - What should be the criteria for covering such stories?
5. **The wrestling coach learns that the student newspaper is planning to print an action picture of one of his wrestlers in a match that he lost. The wrestling coach summons the photographer and demands that the photo she took not be used. The picture shows the two wrestlers in an upright position with neither at an advantage. However, the winning wrestler from the visiting school is a girl.**
- Should you ever run a photo of a home team wrestler losing to an opponent?
  - What if the photo does not show the opponent having the advantage?
  - What if the match is for the state championship?
  - Should the fact that the victor is a girl have any relevancy?
  - Should the photographer or editor be at all concerned that the photo could be particularly embarrassing to the boy who was defeated by the girl?
  - Should the newspaper or yearbook allow a coach to censor a photograph?
  - How should the newspaper or yearbook respond to the coach’s attempt to censor the photograph?
  - What may be the consequences if the photo is run? If it is not run?
6. **The principal is arrested for operating a motorboat while under the influence. The story is covered in the community newspaper. Students are talking about the incident at school, but they don’t all have the correct facts. The principal is very popular with students and cooperates with the newspaper/yearbook staff in a very supporting way.**
- Should this story be covered in the weekly student newspaper or yearbook? If yes, how? Page one? Editorial? Letters to the editor?

- Walter Cronkite once said, "Truth knows neither friend nor enemy, nor should those who pursue it." How may that statement apply to the case at hand?
- Is it worth covering this story if it will mean the wrath of the faculty?
- What criteria should be used in determining whether a story embarrassing to the school should be run?
- A judge dropped the charges against the principal a month later. How should the student newspaper or yearbook cover that story?