

## **The Mustang Morning News Staff Manual** **Revised 9/18/2017**

This document covers behavior and actions by our staff, and acts as a guide for our work as journalists.

**Absence policy** Being a productive member of The Mustang Morning News is much like having a real-world job. Each day, others rely on your participation. Therefore, great care should be taken when planning pre-arranged absences and field trips. Students should be mindful of the deadline schedule when planning for other activities. For example, speaking with peers on the day of a deadline is avoidable. Excessive absences may result in the removal from staff.

**Advertising policy** The news directors, with guidance from the adviser, shall determine if any advertisement is not acceptable. Ads for illegal products or services will be rejected. Advertisers without credit history may be required to prepay.

**Anonymous source policy** At the discretion of the news directors, anonymous sources may be used. To provide transparency and accountability to our audience, it is preferred to use sources who will go on the record. However the Mustang Morning News understands there are instances when the use of an anonymous source is appropriate, in accordance with NSPA Model Code of Ethics policy 7.10. When anonymous sources are used, only the reporter and news directors should know the identity of the source.

**Before publication approval policy** Stories, interviews or video footage will not be shared with non-staff members before publication unless the reporter and/or news directors determine the need to confirm information for clarification. Interviewed subjects have no right to approve a story they appear in.

**Byline & photo credit policy** All stories written/produced by an individual will receive a byline with the exception of an editorial. Any photos/videos that appear in the Mustang Morning News publications will receive a photo credit. Reporters are expected to write their own captions. If more than three people contributed to a story the byline will read, "staff."

**Cafeteria/Quad/Hallway policy** The school grounds are a great place to find sources and conduct interviews. However, a staff member should never leave class to eat or socialize during a period they are not scheduled to do so. On a rare occasion Mr. Hernandez might give permission for someone to leave class early to record footage. Students found leaving class for reasons other than journalistic purposes will (a) be disciplined or (b) be removed from staff.

**Cell phone/mobile device policy** We understand that cell phones and mobile devices are an important tool for journalists. If you are found to be using your phone or mobile device for purposes other than a journalistic purpose during class, it will be confiscated and returned to you at the end of the day on a first offense. Additional consequences may also apply. A second offense will result in the phone being given to the appropriate administrator.

**Class interruptions policy** Every effort should be taken to complete Mustang Morning News business in a manner which is not disruptive to another classroom or student sources. If a class must be interrupted, the staff member should introduce himself or herself to the teacher

(preferably in advance), mention why you are there and ask permission to conduct your business.

In addition, we attempt to make interruptions only toward the beginning of a class period, or at a time when the teacher has expressed you should be there. The best bet is to always plan ahead and take care of business during a passing period, lunch or before or after school.

**Classroom cleanliness policy** It is everyone's job to keep the Media Arts Lab neat. The room is not a locker or cafeteria. If you are keeping something in the room it should be placed somewhere that does not create a mess. It is your responsibility to keep your immediate work area and entire lab free of dirt, dust, food, trash and other items that may damage the equipment.

**Class time work policy** It is expected you will stay active and engaged on your work for MMN each class period. At no time should you leave early, line up at the door before the end of the period, or work on assignments from other classes without the permission of the adviser.

**Communication policy** From time-to-time the staff, producers or Mr. Hernandez will correspond with you via e-mail, texting or social media. It is your responsibility to develop a routine for checking your accounts for correspondence.

**Communication regarding publications policy** Letters-to-the-editor are the most appropriate way to communicate with the staff, however the correspondence we receive takes a number of forms. E-mails, posts and calls will be shared with appropriate staff members. Exceptions to this are unsigned letters, libelous comments or comments intended to cause harm.

**Computer policy** Computers are for Mustang Morning News use. Computers are not for game-playing, shopping or homework. Students on deadline always have first-use of computers. Students should never download applications to the computer. Students should take every effort to take care of the computers at all times.

Students should avoid using proxies and passwords to access websites that are not appropriate for school and could cause viruses or other problems. Should a student need to access a blocked site, they should see Mr. Hernandez first.

**Conduct policy** It is expected that when you are conducting Mustang Morning News business you act professionally and courteously. You are not only representing yourself, but the staff, adviser and school. You should always do your best to leave a positive impression.

**Conflict of interest policy** There are several occasions when, as a student journalist, a conflict of interest might arise. For starters, a reporter should never quote him or herself, nor use his or her friends as sources. This is unprofessional. Reporters should avoid writing stories about activities they participate in. A reporter who also plays basketball should not cover that sport. Student journalists wishing to hold an editorial position such as news director may not be president of student council or a class council. This is seen as a major conflict of interest. Mustang Morning News students are encouraged to be active in school, but must understand that there are limits to activities a producer can be involved with so as to maintain journalistic independence and avoid conflict of interest, whether implicit or explicit.

**Content-decision policy** Content of the Mustang Morning News is determined by student producers in accordance with the US Supreme Court case Tinker v Des Moines and California Education Code 48907. The adviser does not determine content. The Mustang Morning News does not engage in prior review before publication.

**Controversial topics policy** The Mustang Morning News may from time-to-time cover controversial topics. Student journalists should be responsible when covering such topics and work closely with the Adviser for guidance. While not under prior review, student producers may decide to give the principal a head's up on the controversial topic before the news story is distributed.

**Corrections policy** The goal of the Mustang Morning News is to have no errors; however, the goal is not easily accomplished. The staff will apologize for such errors and will run corrections when possible.

**Crime policy** If a student or faculty member at Mira Costa commits a criminal act, or is alleged to have committed a criminal act, it is considered newsworthy and will be reported on appropriately.

**Deadline policy** Meeting deadlines is of the utmost importance to journalists. If you feel as though you will not be able to meet a deadline you should immediately discuss with a producer. The news director may grant extensions at his or her pleasure. Failure to meet a deadline could result in (a) a failing grade and/or (b) dismissal from staff.

**Dismissal from staff policy** Being on staff can be rewarding and a lot of fun. However, there are times when students might be removed from staff. These infractions include, but are not limited to: plagiarism, fabricated work, breaking of school rules, breaking of the law, lapses in journalism ethics or failure to meet deadlines.

**E-mail address policy** For the purposes of conducting Mustang Morning News business, students should have a professional e-mail address not associated with the school that is frequently checked.

**“Editorial” policy** From time to time, The Mustang Morning News will feature an editorial, which reflects the viewpoint of the majority of the editorial board (with contribution from the entire staff). Final decisions regarding the editorial will be made by the news directors, though the actual editorial might be written by a different member of the editorial staff.

**Editorial policy enforcement policy** The appointed news directors shall interpret and enforce the editorial policy.

**News director as a leader policy** It is expected news directors will lead by example at all times during class time. It is also expected that news directors will behave appropriately when representing their publication outside of the classroom.

While they cannot be monitored 24/7, news directors are role models and should follow all school rules and laws. Failure to adhere to school rules or laws could result in (a) loss of position or (b) removal from staff.

**Equipment use policy** Any equipment borrowed from the class should be used responsibly and returned in the condition it was lent. Students are responsible for any damage to Media Arts equipment. Staff will follow the equipment sign out procedures as defined by the adviser, and must return all equipment promptly. If a student in possession of equipment is absent, they must make arrangements with their parents or other staff members to return all equipment for them by the due date.

**Faculty & staff name policy** In accordance with AP Style, faculty and staff will be referred to by full name on first reference and by last name on future references.

**Food & drink policy** Food and drink are prohibited from the Media Arts Lab. Food and drink are only permitted in the Studio area. Having food and drink outside of the Studio area will result in disciplinary actions.

**Grading policy** To ensure detailed feedback, all staff members will provide self- and peer evaluations. These will be submitted via Google Forms or other paper forms to the adviser, who will then evaluate all students and assign grades. Grades are assigned by evaluating a combination of journalistic production, class work, participation and effort.

**Guest writers policy** The use of guest writers is at the discretion of the news directors.

**Internet photos policy** Staff members should never use photographs from the Internet unless they are for reviews or of legitimate news-value. Even then, a staff member should seek approval from the news director regarding the appropriateness of such use. As a general rule, Internet photos are not ours to use and the quality of such photos is not good enough to use in our newscast.

**Interviewing policy** Every attempt should be made to conduct in-person at a neutral location or location comfortable for the interview subject. Should an in-person interview not be possible, a Facetime, Skype, Zoom, or Google Hangout interview is an appropriate back-up solution. Instant messaging, Facebook chat and Q&A sheets are never acceptable interviewing techniques. E-mail interviews are discouraged and should only be done at the approval of the news directors. If an interview is done via e-mail, it should be documented in the story.

In the state of California it is legal to record a conversation as long as one person involved knows the recording is taking place. That being said, it is appropriate to let a person know if you are planning to record your conversation.

**Leaving school policy** Generally, outside-of-school work needs to be completed during non-school hours. There are special circumstances, though, when a reporter will need to leave school during class time. Adviser, Mr. Hernandez, will determine whether or not leaving school is an appropriate option on a case-by-case basis. Planning ahead at least 24 hours is preferred. An Off-grounds pass must be obtained from the attendance office.

**Leaving the room policy** Whenever you leave the room you should check with the adviser and news directors, letting them know where you are going. You should check back in when you return. There are no exceptions to this policy.

**Letter to the editor policy** Letters to the editor are welcomed and encouraged, but will only be published if they are signed. News directors reserve the right to edit letters for length, grammar and unacceptable content. Letters to the editor should be delivered to Room 108.

**No harm policy** It is possible that in the act of reporting a story, a reporter will come upon a troubled source who may need outside help. In addition to being a reporter, you are a human being. Adhering to the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics edict to “do no harm,” a reporter should notify an adult if they believe a source is going to injure themselves or take their own life immediately.

**Obituary policy** In the occurrence of the death of a faculty member or student, The Mustang Morning News will produce a news story about the deceased with his or her name, a list of survivors, school activities list and student quotes. The obituary is a news story, and will not play on emotions or serve as a memorial tribute. All student or faculty deaths will be handled in the same, fair manner.

**Opinion policy** The views of columnists are not necessarily those of the rest of the staff. The publication strives to present a variety of diverse views.

**Outside-of-school behavior policy** While you may not be an on-duty student journalist 24/7, it is important to understand how you conduct yourself outside of school will reflect upon you when you are working as a student journalist. It is strongly encouraged that you always behave appropriately, being mindful of how you conduct yourself in public and on social media. Should inappropriate behavior interfere with your responsibilities as a student journalist you could be removed from staff.

When attending a school field trip all school rules are to be followed at all times.

**Ownership policy** Assignments completed as part of a publications class will become the exclusive property of The Mustang Morning News for the entire school year. At the conclusion of the year, publications will share rights with the owner of the work.

**Photo/video manipulation policy** Electronic manipulations changing the essential truth of a photo, illustration or video will be clearly labeled as a “photo illustration.”

**Plagiarism & lying policy** Plagiarism and/or the use of writer-created quotes or information in any form will result in the immediate dismissal from staff and a F for the class. We do not tolerate or condone plagiarism, misquoting or misinformation of any kind.

**Press pass policy** Having a press pass is a privilege. Passes should be used responsibly at all times. Any time you leave the room you should have your press pass out and visible. Press passes can get you into special events you are covering, however you should plan ahead when using your press pass at an athletic event or school program.

Students who abuse their press pass will be (a) required to surrender their pass and/or (b) be removed from staff.

**Printing policy** The printer is for adviser and Mustang Morning News use. The printer is not for personal use. Students should plan ahead or go to the library for personal printing needs.

**Profanity policy** Profanity may appear in a news story, but only in cases of direct quotes or if the profanity is necessary to the content of the story. In questionable cases, the news directors will determine whether the use of profanity is vital to the story.

Please do not confuse profanity with obscenity. No stories or pictures/videos of an obscene nature will be published. Definitions and examples for the above instances can be found at [splc.org](http://splc.org).

**Mustang Morning News-driven complaints policy** Viewers with concerns or complaints regarding news stories will be directed to speak with the news directors. The adviser will become involved when deemed appropriate by the news directors or should the adviser determine the need to become involved sooner.

**Reenactments policy** Reenacting or recreating events through video, audio graphics or other means should be avoided, and may be used only at the discretion of the news directors.

**Removal/Deletion policy** Once a story has been aired or posted on online platforms, it may not be removed or deleted. An exception may be made in the case of a compelling journalistic reason, such as a violation of standard journalistic ethics (for example, the story is found to be libelous, slanderous, or may cause harm). Factual errors are not cause for deletion of a story, but will compel the staff to correct to make corrections, and include an editor's note to reflect the change from a previous version.

**Reporting policy** Reporting is at the heart of journalism. Therefore, there are several expectations when it comes to reporting. First and foremost, reporting should be authentic, fair and accurate. A reporter should always keep all his or her notes from a story, including, but not limited to: research, interviews and observations.

**Staff conflict policy** Occasionally, staff members will have disagreements that can get out-of-hand. Staff members should always try to remain calm and respectful and deal with issues before they become large-scale problems. Should a conflict arise, the news directors will devise a resolution plan. Should further assistance be needed, the adviser will determine the appropriate course of action to end any conflicts.

**Staff manual policy** Every staff member is expected to become familiar with the manual and use it as a constant resource throughout the year.

**Staff position policy** Each year, new producers are chosen for the Mustang Morning News. This happens through a combination of application, interviews and recommendations. Any staff member is welcome to apply for producer positions.

All students wishing to be on staff must commit to attending a summer journalism workshop. Students who do not attend a workshop will not be considered for the position. A student who says they will attend and does not will have their position revoked.

**Use of minors' names policy** There is no law regarding the use of the name of a minor involved with a criminal activity in the media. The news directors will determine when it is appropriate to withhold the name of a minor in a publication. Victims of sex crimes are generally

not named. The news directors will determine if and when any names should be published or withheld.