

Ethics Policy of The Brandeis Hoot  
As adopted from The Society of Professional Journalists Ethics Code

Per The Brandeis Hoot Constitution, The Brandeis Hoot aims to “provide the Brandeis community with a reliable, accurate and unbiased source of news and information through the regular publication of a tabloid newspaper distributed on campus and online.”

The Brandeis Hoot is dedicated to the belief that better journalism leads to better policy, and is thus dedicated to the principles of investigative reporting and news analysis. Inspired by the Center for Public Integrity, The Brandeis Hoot aims to produce investigative journalism about issues of particular concern to the Brandeis community.

As part of its work as the community newspaper, The Brandeis Hoot hopes to empower community members by making authority figures, whether administrators or student leaders, accountable to the community as a whole. While The Brandeis Hoot respects the work of university administrators and the sometimes delicate nature of their work, The Brandeis Hoot is dedicated to making relevant aspects of their decisions and decision-making process transparent.

In order to pursue the above goals, The Brandeis Hoot is committed to following the code of ethics as laid out by the Society of Professional Journalists. This includes four core values—*Seek the Truth and Report it, Minimize Harm, Act Independently and Be Accountable*.

The Brandeis Hoot will follow those guidelines in the following ways:

**Seek the Truth and Report It**

*Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.*

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.
  - The use of anonymous sources is reserved for situations in which The Hoot could not otherwise print information. This information must be considered both reliable and newsworthy.
  - The Hoot does not use anonymous sources in the event that sources we can name are available.
  - Anonymous sources must have direct knowledge of the information they are giving.
  - In the event that an anonymous source is used, the readers must be informed within the article of the source's motivation for remaining anonymous.
  - Additionally, when using an anonymous source, The Hoot must print as much as is known about the source as possible. I.E. grade, how they came across information, etc.
  - Anonymity should not be offered to a source. They must ask for it.
  - In all cases in which an anonymous source is used, every effort must be made by the reporter to verify the information that they have been given by sources that will be named.
  - Pseudonyms should not be used for anonymous sources unless a lack of pseudonym would create confusion within the article.

- Reporters must inform their section editor(s) and the editor(s)-in-chief upon considering using an anonymous source. Ultimately the decision of whether or not to use the source in question will be up to the editors; however, the reporter should be consulted in the decision.
- Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.
  - When interviewing sources, staff members must ensure that they thoroughly explain what "on the record" means before the interview is conducted.
  - Staff members must ensure that sources know what they say is considered on the record unless they specifically say otherwise.
  - When using any of the following terms with sources, reporters must explain the terms to the source before learning whatever information the source has. The following terms are defined as follows:
    - EMBARGO: Information that may not be released until a time specified by the source but which has been leaked to the reporter earlier in order to allow time for reporting. If an embargo is used and reporters' sources are limited as a consequence, such circumstances must be disclosed in the text of the article.
    - OFF THE RECORD: Reporters may not use this information at all—not even in order to find other information or other sources.
    - BACKGROUND: The thrust of the information may be used, but direct quotes may not. Depending on the arrangement with the source, specific attribution might not be used.
    - DEEP BACKGROUND: The information may not be printed at all, but may be used for the reporter as a guide to other leads or sources. (Deep background information must be confirmed before being reported.)
  - If a source is about to disclose information that is "off the record" the reporter should stop them and not listen to it in order to avoid confusing "off the record" and "deep background" information. A reporter may ask for clarification from the source to see if the information is meant for "deep background" or "off the record."
  - Use of "background" or "deep background" information must be discussed with the section editor(s) and editor(s)-in-chief.
- Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
- Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations as such.
  - Images must be genuine in every way.
  - No people or objects may be added, rearranged, reversed, distorted or removed from a scene (except in the case of cropping).
  - Adjusting color and gray scale should be limited to ensuring that the photos are fit to be printed by the printer.
  - Pictures of news situations must not be posed.
  - The layout editor should be consulted in the event that question arises.

- Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. IF re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.
- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story.
  - Staff members must immediately disclose their identity under all circumstances (whether face to face or otherwise), and must identify themselves as journalists when working for The Hoot.
  - Theater, music or art critics who provide reviews may hide the fact that they are journalists when researching to write a review in order to keep the integrity of the review
- Never plagiarize.
- Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.
- Reporters should examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.
- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability physical appearance or social status.
- Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.
- Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.
- Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.
- Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.

### **Minimize Harm**

*Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.*

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm and discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.
- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.
- Be cautious about identifying survivors of sex crimes.
- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
- Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

### **Act Independently**

*Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.*

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.

- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
  - This includes all positions within the Student Union.
  - No member of the sports staff may participate in the sport about which they are writing.
  - Members of the staff may only accept free concert tickets, movie tickets, books, etc. if they are intending on reviewing them for The Hoot.
- Disclose unavoidable conflicts to both the editorial board and to readers.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
- Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.
- No aspect of the newspaper should be available to any person other than the staff members before it is made available to the public.
  - No source or party involved in any article, aside from the reporter and the editors, is allowed to read any article in full before it is printed in the paper and available to the public.
  - Sources are allowed to ask that reporters email them their quotations before going to print in order to ensure accuracy. In such a circumstances, reporters must comply with their source's request.
- Cultivating sources is essential to the reporting of news. However, staff members must be aware that such relationships with sources can lead to favoritism.
  - Staff members may see sources in a casual, friendly setting, but must keep in mind the difference between business and friendship. When interviewing a source, personal detachment must be present.
  - Only staff members covering events where free tickets or press passes are afforded to the press may accept free tickets.
  - Staff members should avoid interviewing sources with which they are romantically involved.

### **Be Accountable**

*Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, views and each other.*

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
  - When the readers contact Hoot staffers with questions either via email, written letter, telephone or any other mode of communication, Hoot staffers must reply to our readers in all possible cases and in a manner as courteous as possible.
  - Any explanations about Hoot articles to the public shall be made by the editor(s)-in-chief.
  - In the event that a reporter or editor other than the editor(s)-in-chief is questioned about the validity, integrity or any other aspect of the article, they should consult the editor(s)-in-chief before responding and/or refer the question to the editor(s)-in-chief.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.

- Those with grievances should be encouraged to write a letter to the editor or to consult with the editor(s)-in-chief.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
- Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
- Abide by the same high standards to which we hold others.
- Accuracy is of the utmost importance, as readers depend upon our newspaper to read the truth and the facts. Therefore corrections, large and small, will always be printed in the paper and corrected in the online copy.
  - When online copy is corrected, it will be corrected within the article; however, a notation will be added at the bottom of the article to indicate that a correction has been made, and the exact nature of that correction.

#### **Consequences of Violating the Code**

- Staff members and contributors who plagiarize or fabricate will not be tolerated on The Brandeis Hoot and will be immediately fired upon their discovery.
- Violation of any agreed confidentiality (ex. naming an anonymous source) or embargo (ex. releasing information before the time of the embargo) will also result in firing.

#### **Internet Policy**

- In the interest of accuracy and of maintaining a public record, The Hoot does not remove articles from its website for any reason whatsoever. If an article is found to be mistaken, a correction shall be added to the article.
- In the interest of accuracy and of maintaining a public record The Hoot does not remove names used in articles post-publication unless it is discovered that a confidentiality agreement between reporter and source has been violated.
- In the interest of accuracy and of maintaining a public record The Hoot does not remove the names of authors of articles from its website.
  - In the event that an author requests it, The Hoot will publish the author's first initial instead of their entire first name. However, under no circumstances will the author's last name be omitted.

#### **Conduct Concerning Other Publications**

- Any conflicts that occur between The Hoot and The Justice should be dealt with by the editor(s)-in-chief only, after conferring with the involved members of The Hoot.
  - The editor(s)-in-chief should first refer to the editor of The Justice in the event of a conflict. However, if that does not adequately resolve the problem, the issue should be aired at the bi-weekly meetings between the editors and the Dean of Student Life.
- The Hoot should avoid quoting other news sources at all costs unless the information is such that members of The Hoot could not otherwise uncover.
  - If another news source is quoted in an article, the text of the article must explain why the information was not available to The Hoot directly (ex. an administrator refused to comment to The Hoot).

#### **Editing Policy**

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- The Hoot reserves the right to edit all of its copy as its editors see fit. However, after editing an article, editors must email the writer with a revised copy of their work and call them to inform the writer of the changes. This is in an effort to both ensure that the writer learns from their mistakes and to foster community learning and engagement within The Hoot.
- The Hoot has standards that apply to all work that it prints. Therefore The Hoot Opinions editor will edit Opinions copy to ensure that it is well written and tasteful. Because the writer's voice is imperative to good opinions copy, the Opinions editor will inform the writer of any changes he has made before the copy goes to print. This, however, should not discourage the editor from editing.
- If the editor has any questions regarding whether or not his edit is warranted, he should ask the editor(s)-in-chief for guidance.
- When profanity is used in a quotation that it shall not be edited out. However, reporters must ensure that sources that use profanity with them understand completely what "on the record" means.
- Profanity should not be edited out of any opinions article as it keeps with the writer's voice. However, if the profanity is deemed excessive or in poor taste by the editors, the writer should be contacted for a discussion.
- Readers should be able to assume that every word between quotation marks is what the source has said. Therefore, we do not clean up quotes. If a source wants to read their quotes for accuracy, that is allowed. However, grammar will not be changed. (The Hoot does, however, punctuate quotes in keeping with Hoot style.)
- If a subject's grammar or taste is unsuitable, quotation marks should be removed and the quotation paraphrased.
- Writers should omit extraneous syllables like "Um".