

April 27, 2018

**R. Gerald Turner**

President, Southern Methodist University  
P.O. 750100  
Dallas TX, 75275

Dear President Turner:

The SMU Daily Campus has been an independent, uncensored voice for students for more than 100 years. All of that will now end, and the paper has its own board to thank for it.

After years of mismanagement and disinterest, the board of the independent non-profit Student Media Company decided in January to dissolve and wrap the newspaper into SMU's journalism department — a move that will allow SMU to exercise editorial control. No announcement was made until April, leaving us scrambling for a solution. When our alumni group, Friends of Student Media, offered money and a proposal to save the company, the board refused to hear it — many members didn't even show up.

Prior to the meeting, we met with board spokesperson David Sedman, who gave us a fundraising goal and offered SMC's financial documentation so we could propose a business plan. We pushed for donations — which, after only a week, amounted to well over \$40,000 with pledges for even more — because we were led to believe that with sufficient funds, we could save SMC.

But the meeting made clear the board never had any intention of allowing such a thing. The members who attended (David Sedman was not among them) refused to reconsider, saying it was “too late.”

The SMC's bylaws require board members to “demonstrate a commitment to freedom of the press and to the preservation and advancement of the independence and autonomy of the company and its media.” The few who show up for meetings are doing the opposite.

The journalism department — through silence and inaction — has been complicit in SMC's end. The newspaper that once was an asset to the whole university will soon become a university-funded vehicle for publishing journalism classwork. That is not what FSM rallied to support.

The board asked if we'd commit to providing the mentorship to the journalism-school run paper that we committed to providing the SMC. We will not. A school-operated press runs contrary to our deeply held beliefs and is antithetical to The Daily Campus' century-long heritage.

Our effort was about preventing censorship — a battle we cannot fight if the school controls the purse strings. Both the board and the journalism school disregarded our motivations.

The Daily Campus has grappled with censorship since its founding and became independent a decade later so students could write freely. Articles dating back to 1936 decry SMU's willingness to stifle student voices. More recently, The Daily Campus has faced threats of eviction from its campus office — for which it pays rent — and moves to block opinion articles. And, damningly, SMU removed its pledge not to censor student publications from its handbook in 2013.

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We expressed these concerns repeatedly to the board and the journalism school. Neither were persuaded. Both said they did not believe the administration would attempt to censor students, ignoring all evidence to the contrary. They have offered no explanation for how they intend to shield the school-run publication from censorship by the administration.

We are deeply concerned about the quality of accountability journalism moving forward at SMU. The paper will be run by a journalism department that has lost its focus on tried and true reporting. The offerings of the journalism school — and the rise of the fashion media program — have directly led to a growing disinterest in the work of hard news in student media. It is not clear that, under the direction of the journalism school, there would be any regeneration of interest in holding SMU accountable. We hope we are wrong.

Killing the SMC was an avoidable choice. The money we raised came from dozens of alumni across the country. It was a remarkable show of support, and it is disappointing to imagine what such a willing alumni base could have done with more time and willing partners.

We're not going to allow the money we've raised to go to waste. The donations we've collected, and the donations we intend to collect well into the future, will be used to fund annual scholarships for Dallas-area students who plan to study journalism at colleges and universities with independent student press. We are excited to be part of the future of student media — even if we cannot be part of that future at SMU.

Sincerely,

Chip Mahaney, '86  
Ted Gangi, '87  
Chip Stewart, '94  
Kandice Keene Bridges, '94, '97, '99  
Scott Slezak '95  
Chad Watt, '95  
Alan Fossler, '96  
Christina James, '97  
Jennifer C. Wang '97  
Jennifer Bassman, '98  
Matt Jacob, '98  
Christina Hagegeorge, '98  
Emily Muscarella Guthrie, '98  
Stephen Blum, '98  
James Pecht, '99  
Feras Gadamsi '02  
Nancy Black, '02  
Courtney Aliksaites Keys, '02  
Jonathan Dewbre, '03  
Richard Martin, '03  
R. Kirk McPike, '05  
Jessica Alexandre, '05  
Clark Castle, '05  
Veronica Terefenko, '05  
Jessica Savage, '06

Austin Kilgore, '06  
Mark Norris, '08  
John Schreiber, '08  
Sommer Saadi, '08  
Cole Hill, '09  
Laura Ratliff, '10  
Nate Regan, '10  
Taylor Adams, '11  
Jessica Huseman, '11  
Joshua Parr, '11  
Stuart Palley, '11  
Meredith Shamburger, '11  
Ashley Withers, '11  
Sarah Kramer, '12  
Chandler Schlegel, '13  
Kent Koons, '13  
Brandon Bub, '14  
Chase Wade, '14  
Sidney Hollingsworth, '15  
Christopher Saul '15  
Demetrio Teniente IV '15  
Patrick Engel, '17  
Paula Streiff, former advertising advisor  
Mark Witherspoon, former student adviser

**CC:**

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