Student Newspaper Policy
University of Melbourne Student Union

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Policy History
28 July, 2009: Students’ Council adopts Student Newspaper Policy.
10 December, 2013: General Secretary proposes amendments to the Student Newspaper Policy.
17 December, 2013: Students’ Council adopts amendments to the Student Newspaper Policy.

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1. Introduction and Values

This shall be the policy of UMSU Inc and it shall apply in all relevant matters relating to the Media Department and its production of Farrago.

Farrago has a long history of providing various students a voice on campus. Founded in 1925, Farrago has existed through multiple incarnations of the Student Union, including the Students’ Representative Council (1907-1989), Melbourne University Student Union Inc (1989-2004), Interim Students’ Representative Council (2005) and the present UMSU/MUSUL structure.

UMSU is committed to the following values in the publication of Farrago:
- Truth
- Balance
- Independence
- Respectful discourse
- The rights of all groups, including the marginalised, to be heard

2. Editorial Responsibility

UMSU recognises that the General Secretary is the publisher in name only and has no power to determine the content of Farrago or to authorise its publication.

Ultimate editorial responsibility lies with the Media Officers. The Media Officers shall have the exclusive privilege of determining the content of Farrago including but not limited to soliciting content, publishing content or not publishing content. The Media Officers are only obliged to publish two types of content, unless they are not submitted on time, breach this policy, content standards or there are legal reasons to not publish: Officer Reports and election coverage which includes details of polling places, times and candidate statements.

The Media Officers shall also be responsible for ensuring that Farrago abides by all necessary legal requirements, including but not limited to defamation, privacy and tape-recording. The Media Officers shall ensure that adequate training is available for students participating in Media Department activities such that they are aware of and abide by the necessary legal requirements.

The Media Officers shall also be responsible for:
- Avoiding all conflicts of interest and ensuring that any potential conflict of interest is adequately disclosed.
- The development, administration and application of a style guide.
- Ensuring that all submissions which are received are acknowledged and authors are advised of editorial decisions.
- Ensuring that all authors of published content are satisfied with the work that is credited to them before publication including,
  - Ensuring that authors are informed of and satisfied with substantive edits
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- Where a Club, Society or Group has submitted content for publication that the Club, Society or Group is informed of and satisfied with substantive edits.

As set out in rule 66 of the Constitution and rule 9.2 of Procedures for Student Representatives, it is the responsibility of the Media Officers to ensure that Media Department publications do not contravene the aims, purposes and objectives of UMSU. For the purpose of these rules, the aims, purposes and objectives of UMSU are those which are included in its Statement of Purposes:

1. To advance the welfare and interests of Students;
2. To represent Students of the University within the University and to the community;
3. To provide amenities and services, principally for Students and other members of the University community, and incidentally to the public, but in all cases not inconsistent with agreements made with MU Student Union Limited or the University, as the case may be, from time to time;
4. To provide an independent framework for Student social and political activity;
5. To develop, maintain and support Student clubs, societies and associational life generally;
6. To promote and defend the rights of Students to education on the basis of equality, without regard to race, colour, sex, sexuality, gender identity, age, physical disability, mental illness, economic circumstances, political religious or ideological conviction, or national or social origin;
7. To provide a democratic and transparent forum in which Students’ affairs and interests can be governed in an effective and accountable manner; and
8. To promote free and accessible government-funded education.

3. Student News

News content relates to reporting of the facts involved in and surrounding current events and affairs.

News content shall be as unbiased, independent and accurate as possible. Much of the news content included in Farrago shall relate to Student interests.

Interviewees shall not be paid. Interviewees are free to answer “no comment” to any question. No legal indemnity or promise of legal assistance is granted by UMSU to an interviewee for any legal actions which may arise in relation to their comments.

Once a student has identified themselves as participating in the production of content for Farrago, it shall be assumed that comments are on the record unless it is agreed otherwise.

Comments may be:
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- **On the record**: what is said may be disclosed and attributed to the interviewee or source,
- **On background or non-attributable**: what is said may be disclosed but not attributed to the interviewee or source, or
- **Off the record**: what is said may not be disclosed or attributed to the interviewee or source.

Students participating in producing student news shall abide by all relevant laws and may not use concealed recording equipment.

Information about the author’s background (including employment, affiliations or activity) which may be relevant to the story should be succinctly reported alongside the article.

News articles should be prepared with due care, especially when dealing with sensitive subjects such as sexuality, violence or suicide. It is important to ensure that the language and tone is not disrespectful and that the article does not encourage or advise others to do harm to themselves or others.

**4. Student Opinion**

Content which presents the particular point of view or opinion of the author may be published in *Farrago*. The disclaimer, prescribed in rule 9 of Procedures for Student Representatives shall be sufficient for informing the public that the opinions expressed in *Farrago* are not necessarily those of UMSU. The Media Officers are free to publish an additional disclaimer alongside opinion pieces to remind readers that the opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Media Officers, Media Department or UMSU.

An opinion piece is bound by the same rules relating to Student News except the need to be unbiased and independent. An opinion piece must still present facts accurately, abide by relevant laws and treat interviewees and sources properly.

In making a decision whether or not to publish content which expresses the particular point of view or opinion of the author, the Media Officers shall not discriminate between content based on the opinion which is expressed.

Opinions which disagree with or criticise UMSU, its position, actions or conduct may be published in *Farrago*. The publication of diverse and contrary views, even if they question the aims, purposes and objectives of UMSU shall be considered part of the aim of UMSU to "provide a democratic and transparent forum in which Students’ affairs and interests can be governed in an effective and accountable manner." The publication of diverse and dissenting views is also consistent with the values of balance, independence and the rights of all groups, including the marginalised, to be heard.

**5. Topical and Factual Content**
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Topical and factual content covers a broad range of content which is not news, opinion or creative content. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to, research articles, reviews and interviews.

Such articles must abide by the same rules as News content regarding being independent and accurate, the treatment of interviewees or sources and the disclosure of relevant aspects of the author’s background. Topical and factual content may present the particular point of view or opinion of the author.

An extra emphasis shall be placed on accuracy and if the Media Officers deem it necessary, may seek a review from someone with relevant expertise in the area. This may include, but is not limited to, a student undertaking a relevant major or an academic who is an expert in the field.

6. Creative Content

Creative content refers to cartoons, short stories, poems, drawings, paintings and other artistic contributions to Farrago.

Creative content may also include satire and parody which may critique the objects which it represents, such as society, the University or UMSU. Such content may be published in the interest of providing a “democratic and transparent forum”. If such satire or parody critiques UMSU, its aims, objectives, purposes, positions, actions or conduct, such content shall be considered part of the aim of UMSU to “provide a democratic and transparent forum” in the same way as Opinion Content.

7. User-generated Content

Content generated by users should be published in Farrago, primarily in the form of Letters to the Editor.

A Letter to the Editor or other user-generated content is not bound by the same rules as other types of content. Such content is free to present the view of its author and shall only be edited for legal reasons, grammar or layout (space) considerations. There shall be no guarantee that the facts presented in such content are accurate.

Publication of a Letter to the Editor shall be a major avenue for anyone exercising a right of reply.

8. Content Standards

Farrago and other Media Department publications may not contravene the aims and purposes of UMSU. A Media Department publication shall not be considered to be in breach of this requirement for simply publishing content which criticises or is in disagreement with UMSU, its purposes, aims, objectives, positions, actions or conduct. The consideration of diverse views is consistent with UMSU’s
 aims to “provide an independent framework for Student social and political activity” and to “provide a democratic and transparent forum in which Students’ affairs and interests can be governed in an effective and accountable manner.”

In order for material in *Farrago* to contravene this requirement, it must go beyond criticism or dissent from UMSU, its purposes, aims, objectives, positions, actions or conduct.

UMSU recognises that some students contributing to *Farrago* may only be willing to contribute if allowed to remain anonymous or use a pseudonym. In the interests of providing a democratic forum, where all groups have the right to be heard, anonymous or pseudonymous contributions shall be permitted and the Media Officers shall be responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of an anonymous or pseudonymous author’s identity. The Media Officers should prevent the use of anonymous or pseudonymous publications from interfering with the values of this policy: truth, balance, independence, respect and the rights of all groups, including the marginalised, to be heard.

The Media Officers may determine as a matter of their discretion, whether to publish content which may be offensive. The Media Officers should include the following considerations in their decision-making process:

- How substantial is the potential of the content to offend?
- What is the contribution of the content to debate or student interest?
- How closely linked is the potential to offend to the substance of the work?
- Will the article cause harm or promote harmful practices?

If an article can be revised so that its substance remains largely intact, but its potential to offend is reduced, then the Media Officers should strongly consider requesting the author to revise it.

If potentially offensive content is highly likely to cause harm or promote harmful practices, it should not be published.

If legal advice is obtained that the publication of potentially offensive content would be in breach of the law, then it should not be published. If the Media Officers decide to disregard legal advice and publish such content, then UMSU will not indemnify the Media Officers or the author from any legal action which arises against them personally from the publication of such content.

Where errors are discovered, they should be corrected in the next edition of *Farrago*.

9. Student Politics and Elections

UMSU recognises that the student body is free to determine the political alignment of the Media Officers in the annual elections. However, the Media Officers must abide by regulations which forbid the use of UMSU resources not available to all students during an UMSU election. The Media Officers may not
use their editorial powers to endorse one or more candidates in the UMSU elections.

Each year an edition of Farrago must provide coverage of the UMSU election which shall be available for a period of time that includes the duration of the polling. This edition of Farrago must carry candidate policy statements and details of polling in accordance with Electoral Regulations.

Informing the student body about the world of student politics is important. Additional election coverage may be published provided that it is produced by students who do not hold elected positions in UMSU or other student representative associations recognised by the University. This may include but is not necessarily limited to:

- Interviews with candidates
- Reports on candidate debates
- Reports on student political groups
- Opinion pieces

**10. Complaints and Grievances**

Errors occur at all levels of the Media and Student Media is no different. Where a person feels that they, another person or another group have been treated unfairly, they shall have a right of reply. This right of reply can be exercised by contacting the Media Officers who shall advise what avenues can be taken. These avenues shall include, but not necessarily be limited to, the publication of a Letter to the Editor.

If a person feels that their right of reply provides insufficient reparation for the damage caused they may register a complaint. A complaint may only be registered by someone who is affected either as the subject of unfair treatment or as the member of a group which has been treated unfairly.

A complaint in the first instance should be registered with the Media Officers in writing or by email. A complainant is entitled to receive a response and to have their confidentiality respected.

A complaint should be made in a timely manner, no more than five academic days or two weeks, whichever is the lesser, following the release of an edition of Farrago. The Media Officers may report on and respond to complaints after this time, but are not required to. Similarly a response to a complaint should be made in a timely manner, which should be no more than five academic days following the receipt of a complaint.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response received, they may, within five academic days, appeal to the Secretary in writing or by email. The appeal must describe the nature of the complaint and the desired outcome. The Secretary must then convene a meeting of the Media Complaints Committee.
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The Media Complaints Committee shall be composed of:
- One Media Officer as a non-voting representative.
- Three voting representatives of Students’ Council to be elected by the Operations Sub-Committee at the commencement of the year.
- Two student representatives to be appointed by the Operations Sub-committee if and when a complaint is lodged.

If a voting representative is the complainant, they will be ineligible to sit on the Media Complaints Committee.

The Media Complaints Committee must meet within five academic days of the appeal being received by the General Secretary and may do so electronically or in person. The complainant must be invited to the meeting or included in electronic correspondence. If the membership of the Committee must also be determined, there may be an additional five academic days over which time the Committee must be elected. The Media Complaints Committee may dismiss the complaint, recommend that the Media Officers issue an apology or retraction or refer the matter to Students’ Council if it is believed that a more serious penalty is required. In order to recommend an apology, retraction or more serious penalty, the committee must be convinced that the publication of material mentioned in the complaint constitutes a breach of this policy and/or provisions of the Constitution and Regulations with respect to Farrago and Media Department publications. The outcome of the Media Complaints Committee should be reported to Students’ Council and if the Media Officers do not comply with the recommendation, Students’ Council may direct that they do so.

If the complainant or the Media Officers are not satisfied with the outcome of the Media Complaints Committee, they may appeal to Students’ Council by writing to the General Secretary. Students’ Council may uphold, overturn or modify the decision. If the complaint remains unresolved then the matter may be referred to a General Meeting called in accordance with rule 21 of the Constitution.

Apart from this process or pursuant to legal advice, Students’ Council may not direct the Media Officers to publish or not publish material or otherwise direct the Media Officers with respect to the content of Farrago.

11. Supporting Community and Charitable Causes

Farrago may publish content which promotes community and charitable causes. This may be done through publishing opinion or topical and factual pieces written by students or through publishing advertising material from community or charitable groups.

The Media Officers may waive a part or all of the fees involved in placing advertising material in Farrago and may determine if and how much of such fees will be waived. The Media Officers may not provide such waivers for advertising material promoting community or charitable causes in the following circumstances:
The waiver could be interpreted as an endorsement of a particular religious, political, economic or social point of view, 

- The waiver would undermine the aims and purposes of UMSU, 
- The waiver would promote a group not in line with UMSU Financial Regulations.

12. Sponsorship and External Funding

The Media Officers and UMSU Staff may solicit advertising material and set the fees for placing advertising material in Farrago. External funding may also be accepted, provided that it does not compromise the independence of Farrago.

It must be clear that advertising material is not student content. Where this is not immediately obvious, it should be noted alongside the advertising material, “This is a paid advertisement.”

The Media Department may, in accordance with Financial Regulations, give preference to environmentally and socially responsible companies and may refuse association with environmentally or socially irresponsible companies.