

Stagg Line • Staff Policies

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

First Amendment to the United States Constitution

“Students of the public school shall have the right to exercise freedom of speech and of the press including, but not limited to, the use of bulletin boards, the distribution of printed materials or petitions, the wearing of buttons, badges, or other insignia, and the right of expression in official publications, whether or not such publications are supported financially by the school or by use of school facilities, except that expression shall be prohibited which is obscene, libelous, or slanderous. Also prohibited shall be material which so incites students as to create a clear and present danger of the commission of unlawful acts on school premises or the violation of lawful school regulations, or the substantial disruption of the orderly operation of the school ...”

California Education Code, Section 48907 (excerpt)

MISSION STATEMENT

The Stagg Line is an open forum for student expression committed to producing high-quality information and opinion that represents a significant portion of the student body. News coverage should be fair and thorough. Students are primary decision-makers throughout the publication process, from choosing story ideas to writing headlines. Although students will make mistakes, they will make every effort to double-check work so that those mistakes are kept to a minimum.

BUMPER STICKERS

Look outside yourself • Look beyond your circle

POLICIES

Legal Protections

Staff members are protected by the First Amendment and by Section 48907 of the California Education Code. It is the adviser’s responsibility to ensure that “prohibited expression” — libel, obscenity, and inflammatory material — not be published and to maintain professional standards of English and journalism.

Access

Reporters are free to attend public meetings and quote those who speak at those meetings.

Sources

Student sources are most important to nearly every story, and reporters need to make efforts to ensure that the reader can clearly see student angles and viewpoints.

News stories should have multiple sources in order to present a balanced perspective.

Involvement/Conflict of Interest

Staff members are not to write about (or take pictures of) their friends, family members, or clubs/teams with which they are connected. An opinion column would be an exception.

Diversity

Reporters and photographers will make genuine efforts to include sources and subjects for pictures who represent all parts of the Stagg population. Diversity includes ethnicity but is not restricted to that. Age and gender are the easiest to check.

Self-promotion

As much as possible, reporters should avoid writing stories about each other, the newspaper itself, and the adviser. When newsworthiness makes coverage necessary, that coverage should be restrained.

Integrity/Honesty

Reporters who plagiarize or fabricate are doing the most unethical thing and face the likelihood of being removed from the staff.

Reporters who accept off-the-record information are expected to not print it.

Prior Review

No one outside of the staff has may demand to read a page or a story before publication. The reporter may choose to confirm a quote with the person who said it. In the case of a feature or sports feature profile, the reporter may allow the person to read it.

Interviews/Quote-gathering

Reporters should conduct face-to-face interviews. The telephone should be used to confirm information or ask a follow-up question. It may also be the way to conduct an interview when it is not possible to meet. Written-out questions submitted so that answers can be written and returned is an unacceptable method. E-mail interviews are strongly discouraged.

Reporters are expected to take accurate notes and to keep the notebook throughout the year.

Reporters should honestly cover a story, not just go out to “get a quote.”

Reporters should confirm particularly sensitive quotes, either on-the-spot or later.

After an interview that reveals sensitive information, the reporter is encouraged to have the interview subject sign and date the reporter’s notebook.

Internet Use

Reporters may use the Internet to enhance a story, not to form the basis of it. Students are not to spend too much time on the Internet and not talking with real people.

Legal Behavior

Neither reporters nor photographers will participate in any illegal act in the pursuit of a story.

Withholding of Name

Names will be used, even when doing so may be embarrassing to the student or adult.

Withholding a name, or using a pseudonym, will occur only in the rarest of cases and for good reason. The adviser should meet with the protected student in such a case.

Death of a Student or Adult

A student or adult who passes away will be honored with a tribute box. In some cases, the popularity of the student or adult may call for a story. When the circumstances of the death provoke discussion among the staff, such as suicide or a drunk driving accident, then the editorial board may discuss coverage issues and sensitivities. The general policy should be to not harm those who are grieving.

Editorial Board

This group is made up of editor-in-chief, news editor, opinion editor, and others who are interested. The main task of this group is to determine the editorial topic(s) for each issue, including the stand. The group may also convene at any time to settle ethical issues that arise.

Letters/Responding to Letters

Letters are welcomed and will be printed as long as they adhere to the policy stated in the staff box on the opinion page.

A response is appropriate when an error in fact needs to be cleared up. Generally it is best to allow readers to have the last word.

Corrections/Retractions

Errors of significance will be corrected — as soon as possible on the Web site.

If a retraction is appropriate, it will be printed.

Images/Appropriate Use

Images will not be taken illegally from the Internet. Fair use laws will be observed, meaning that small pictures, for purposes of identification, may be used to accompany a story. For example, a CD cover may accompany a review of that CD; however, a picture of the band that does not come from the band's official Web site may not be used.

The Stagg Line subscribes to MCT/HS Graphics; pictures and graphics may be taken from this site, provided they are properly credited.

Permission

When using a courtesy picture from a student or adult not on staff, permission must be secured and credit must be given.

Web

Efforts will be made to converge with the Web class while maintaining our two sites: stagline.com and thetagline.tumblr.com. Regular updates and announcements will be made using social media, primarily Facebook, by the adviser and blog/social media editor.

Camera Use

Photographers are to learn the proper use of a camera before using one.

When a camera is taken during the school day, the photographer needs to note that on the small white board.

When a camera is taken outside of the school day, it needs to be signed out.

When taking the camera outside of class, the photographer must always be in contact with it.

Press Pass Use

During school hours, reporters and photographers are to be honest with the adviser and anyone else about their activities outside of class.

A press pass may allow one reporter and one photographer into a home game for coverage purposes, but no student should ever use the pass merely to attempt to save money.

Abuse of the press pass will lead to loss of privileges.

STANDARDS FOR EACH SECTION

News

Topics chosen for news stories should reflect traditional standards of newsworthiness — timeliness, proximity, significance and interest — and, as much as possible, look at future implications to educate the reader. Student focus and student sources need to be prominent in news stories. Since the print publication comes out only once a month, stories are expected to be well-researched and adequately sourced. Most news stories will have multiple sources.

Editorials

Topics chosen for editorials will reflect the newspaper's overall stance on an important issue — typically reported on page 1. Topics should have substance, and the editorial board should work hard to say something important. If the editorial exposes a problem, it is worth trying to propose a solution. But not all editorials need to be criticisms. The main writer of an editorial should be someone who is on his/her second or third year on staff.

Columns

Topics chosen for columns should be fresh. The question to ask: *Could this same column have been published three years earlier?* If so, the topic will probably need to be refined or rejected. Columnists must also be reporters — talking to people and deeply researching topics of substance. This does not mean that columns cannot be light, funny or have a personal connection, but columns that *merely* tell a personal story are discouraged.

Features

Topics chosen will be of interest to a student audience and will feature student sources prominently and high in the story. Reporters should immerse themselves in their stories, following their subjects and making relevant observations. People should form the basis of these stories, although data and statistics may enhance them.

Reviews

Topics chosen for reviews should reflect the interest of a student audience. Reporters should learn the language of criticism by reading professional critics, but they are not to read a professional review of the work they plan to review — at least not before they have finished their writing. However, they are encouraged to read other professional reviews of works from the same genre.

Sports Writing

Topics chosen for sports stories should emphasize genuine human interest and not fall into one of two familiar patterns: 1) *We are a like a family*; or 2) *We may be losing this year but this is a rebuilding year and next year should be different*. Neither story is interesting. Profiles are encouraged, not always focused on the star. Reporters are encouraged to attend practices and games to add first-hand coverage to the story.

Sports Coverage

All school sports will be covered, and boys and girls should be covered equitably. Teams that perform better should be entitled to earn more prominent coverage and/or coverage in multiple issues.