

Alexa Wyszowski

Hello. My name is Alexa Wyszowski and I am the current Editor-in-Chief of the campus student newspaper, the Youngtown Edition. We are here tonight to share with you the increasing challenges we have faced in producing an independent student newspaper free of administrative interference. For the past two years, we have experienced an escalating campaign of intimidation, harassment, threats to our resources and been fed a steady diet of misrepresentations, half-truths and outright lies.

During the month of August, I met with Don Phelps, the director of campus life regularly while I was working New Student Orientation, as he wanted to discuss saving the college money by trying to find different alternatives to printing the newspaper. I said I was open to the idea and when he showed me the newspaper printed on copy paper stapled together and then later on slightly larger individual sheets of paper that fell apart, I turned these options down. He made it feel like it would be my responsibility to either save the college money or ruin the print quality of the newspaper. I didn't want to be the student to ruin the quality of the paper, so instead I became the student that wasted the school's money, to save the paper, as the options he showed me were unacceptable and unprofessional.

It is also important to frame this in context. Upon speaking to previous advisors and editors, the focus on the newspaper making money or spending money was never an issue. But this was another avenue to try to hamper the production of the paper.

Allegedly these methods of printing would have cut the costs by 80%, but it would have ruined the newspaper. In order to keep the newspaper printed on newsprint, as suggested by Phelps, I made an agreement with him, that instead of selling \$1,900 worth of ads in the year, I

would sell \$6,000. He kept this under the table and between him and I. I left this meeting feeling abused and manipulated.

Also during the August Orientations Dr. Bette Simmons, Vice President of Student Development and Enrollment Management would regularly pull me aside and discuss Youngtown related matters, topics included interviewing people for the Titan's table story that Dr. Simmons wanted to include in the first edition.

Dr. Simmons is known for these unofficial hallway meetings. And she had been informed by our previous advisor about the concept of prior restraint and that discussing content and pressuring us for stories was not only unacceptable, but it violated our rights. This did not dissuade her from continuing this activity. In fact, once our advisor was removed as a buffer they got worse.

If the Youngtown ran something they approved of, we would get praised. If they ran something they didn't, we were criticized.

On the day of our first production we had no faculty advisor present and administration would not inform us of what was going on until the next day. I was working a table in the student center for Phi Theta Kappa, when Phelps asked me to meet him in his office. Phelps told me Russ Crespolini, our now former faculty advisor, was no longer employed at the college and was no longer our advisor. Dr. Simmons came into his office a short time later, to help answer the questions I had for Phelps that he was unable to answer. I stayed in Phelps office for a long time, as I wondered if the reason for Crespolini being gone, was because of us the students. And also because I couldn't stop crying.

I couldn't help but wonder if the reasons for why was related to the deal I cut with Phelps and if maybe there wasn't even enough money for an advisor. When Dr. Simmons arrived at the meeting she said Crespolini was gone because of a personnel issue, but she explained that they already had a new advisor in mind, one who she hired in January unknown to Crespolini and us. Dr. Simmons said this new advisor would be experienced and be more available, as this person was a full time faculty member. Also during this hour and forty five minute meeting, Dr. Simmons also commented when referring to Crespolini, "we got rid of him" and then said "forget I said that", and this statement made me cry harder.

I mention this to you because like many of these meetings I have been forced into, the tone and the content was completely inappropriate. No student should have been put in a position like this.

A week later Phelps would call me to let me know that a new advisor has been assigned to us and we would not meet him until the second production, where Phelps and Dr. Simmons would introduce him to the staff. Before meeting the new advisor I was sitting in the hallway with a friend, when Dr. Simmons pulled me aside for another infamous hallway meeting and started talking about how she thought the new advisor would work out well for us, and that I would be helping train the new advisor. When we finally met with him we were surprised to learn that he was teaching seven classes and had no background or experience in journalism.

This was extremely upsetting to us because we were told this new advisor, who was hired nine months earlier to be our advisor was experienced and would be more available to us as a full time faculty member. This was now proven to be a complete misrepresentation of the truth.

I went to Dr. Simmons the Monday after this production to tell her about the concerns the staff had about the advisor and she said to be patient as the new advisor had to learn journalism and she said that I was the only person on campus who knew what the advisor's responsibilities were and what the editor-in-chief's responsibilities were. I told her that he was not experienced, had no time and wasn't even sure of how to use Google Drive which we use to edit our stories. As a result of this meeting Dr. Simmons made it clear in an email that now I would not have to train the advisor, but if we needed someone to review over and edit stories, that she would be willing to.

While this level of control may be what the administration wants, and may be what they have been driving for the past two years, it is still inappropriate.

In a meeting about two weeks later Phelps explains that the new advisor has left the position and that we the students would still have a big part in training the new advisor that they would find. He also blamed our "unrealistic expectations" for the reason the new advisor left and that I should have told him and Simmons about our concerns, except I did tell them.

We do not consider being given a subpar advisor and not being lied to repeatedly as having unrealistic expectations. We also do not appreciate being blamed when we clearly shared our concerns. The fact that they fell on deaf ears is not our fault.

Phelps even said that without an advisor he expected us to only be putting out four page papers or even skip editions entirely. During this meeting, I became very upset, was crying again and realized I was no longer comfortable meeting with Phelps or Dr. Simmons by myself, as each time I was meeting with them they were making me upset and instead of helping they were blaming the staff and I for all the problems we were having.

The Youngtown staff has been on their own for the entire semester, with no faculty advisor to help, support and protect us. Also during the course of the semester I received many emails from Dr. Simmons about the Youngtown to my school email account. One email from Dr. Simmons asked me to confirm if we were going to write a story about the steelworkers protesting. This email arrived a few days after talking with Kathleen Brunet. She came in during the meeting I had with Dr. Simmons about the concerns with the advisor as she wanted to relay the information from the college about the steelworkers directly to me. I also received another email from Dr. Simmons asking if I could meet with her and Dr. Iacono, president of CCM and I had to respond asking for clarification for why she wanted to meet and she explained it was for a story. I declined her request as I was trying to keep the Youngtown together despite the lack of an advisor and trying to shoulder the burdens of all their demands. I informed Simmons of this and as a result she responded with "Alexa, I will let Dr. Iacono know that you are "too busy" to meet with him. Additionally, for the remainder of the semester I will not rely on the Youngtown Edition to serve as an information resource for the student body. We will use another medium to share critical information to students." This email I thought was highly inappropriate for me to have received.

Last Monday I was called in to Dr. Iacono's office and I brought another member of the Youngtown staff with me, as I now fear meeting with any administrator by myself. Dr. Iacono said he didn't really know anything about the situation and I basically told him everything. I was shocked to learn that he had no idea what his administrative team was doing to us. I would like to believe that this is the case. But I do find it hard to believe he would be so unaware of what one of his closest VPs was doing.

So I am unsure of who to believe anymore. All in all, we are here tonight because of this feeling. We don't know who to believe or who to trust. We just want to ensure that you, the members of the board are aware of the actions that members of the administration have been taking against students.

Adam Gentile

Hello my name is Adam Gentile, the managing editor of the youngtown and before I get started we would like to thank each and everyone one of you who have decided to come out here tonight, Students supporting students and Faculty Supporting students, because the actions and behaviors that have been taken against us this semester, by the administration can happen to anyone which is why we're speaking here tonight.

A common pattern that you may have heard in Alexa's speech is that she used the word "I" a lot. This is because the administration seemed to have made it a point to isolate Alexa from us and force her to take on these additional responsibilities. During the August orientation when Alexa was being pulled aside by Dr. Simmons and Don Phelps I was also working those orientations, not once was I ever pulled aside or brought into any of these youngtown related meetings despite both Phelps and Dr. Simmons knowing full well that I too was part of youngtown. Honestly the part that disturbs me the most is still the initiative to have Alexa alone in these important meetings despite the fact that the people in the room have made her cry on multiple occasions. These are not the actions of school administrators who are dedicated to growing and nurturing students. When emails are sent out referring to the CCM family and the administration claims to be all about serving students, unfortunately actions speak louder than words

If you recall during one of these August meetings is when Phelps struck that deal with Alexa about having her sell \$6,000 worth of advertisements during this school year. Originally Alexa was led to believe that the reason why printing costs of the youngtown were a concern was because we didn't sell enough advertisements last year. When asked how much youngtown

needed to sell Phelps said \$1,900, when asked how much we made last year Phelps looked this up and said that we sold around \$4,500 worth of ads last year, why was this brought up seemingly out of the blue? Why were we never given a warning last year that we may be using too much money? By the way, it is not our job to save the school money, it's our job to put out a newspaper that gives students proper real world publication experience that is applicable to students of all majors.

When the Youngtown was told about the removal of our advisor it was not until the day after our first production, and the news was only told to Alexa by Dr. Simmons and Mr. Phelps, two people whom Alexa and I saw throughout August and two people who would know that Crespolini was let go in July, just a reminder Dr. Simmons and Mr. Phelps were not afraid to talk to Alexa about Youngtown related matters.

Remember the plan for us to have a new advisor was already planned back in January of 2019, we neither us or Mr Crespolini were made aware of any of this until this situation was thrust upon us. Now if this was planned at least a semester in advance one would think that there would be better communication on the administration's behalf and would have had Mr. Crespolini brief the new advisor during the spring semester, especially given the lack of media experience of this new advisor. Let's also remember that this "more available" full time faculty member was planned to be teaching seven classes this semester, but I guess seven classes isn't that much of a workload.

Speaking of our new advisor when Dr. Simmons was informed of his lack of qualifications what was her initial response. We would have to wait for this new advisor to learn

journalism and publication. This is rather confusing because we're students, We're the ones that are supposed to be learning.

And what happened when our new advisor decided that he was not fit for this job, Alexa was told that he left because we placed unrealistic expectations on him. First off how dare you blame students for your mismanagement. Second let's go into these unrealistic expectations. Is knowing AP style unrealistic, is expecting them to have some publishing experience unrealistic, is having an advisor who could improve our skills as journalists an unrealistic expectation. Now look if all we had to do was explain to this advisor our production cycle of how we come up with content, when deadlines are, and when we edit articles we would be helpful and understanding, however when we are asked to take on the role of a teacher and teach the person who is supposed to be teaching us, one would consider this an unrealistic expectation.

The actions taken against us this semester I feel can be taken in one of two ways, either we have been stuck to deal with a string of incompetant actions done by administrators, or these have all been indirect actions that are meant to kneecap the runnings of our campus newspaper, by giving us an untenured, unqualified, overworked faculty advisor. Trying to deter content and page length by making us concerned of our shrinking budget, and continued actions of isolating, intimidating, and harassing Alexa.

What we have faced is the same culture of fear and intimidation that the faculty spoke of when referring to this administration just one meeting ago. The same fear of retaliation. This is not exclusive to the Youngtown. And that should disturb you.

Anthony Ingham

Hello. I'm Anthony Ingham, the news editor of The Youngtown Edition. Last Wednesday, Denise Bell scheduled a meeting with Alexa to have a follow up meeting from Monday with Dr. Iacono and other members of the administration. Ms. Bell was informed by Alexa that the Youngtown staff would be attending with her. On Thursday, the meeting was separated into two parts as in the first part the staff met with Dr. Iacono and Ms. Bell. The second part of the meeting was when Iacono left the room and then Dr. Simmons, Ms. Vanderhoof, and Mr. Phelps entered the room for their part. These meetings totaled to about an hour and 45 minutes long with nine students from the Youngtown present there.

If we haven't been clear enough, the Youngtown Edition is a student run campus newspaper that has certain rights when it comes to content control. Essentially, unless a story is outright libelous, the students control what goes into the paper. Two years ago, when a story in the Youngtown displeased members of the administration, there was a concerted effort made to infringe on those rights. At that time our advisor, Russ Crespolini, insulated us from much of the pressure. We were subjected to multiple emails and meetings, but we did not know the extent of the pressure being exerted. We did not know what he was protecting us from until he was suddenly and abruptly removed over the summer.

In the absence of a faculty advisor, we contacted the Student Press Law Center for guidance. For those of you who are unaware, they are a non-profit group who work across the country to protect the rights of students who work at student newspapers. After explaining our situation, we got in contact with Mike Hiestand, their Senior Legal Counsel, and upon hearing

our story and reviewing the two years worth of evidence we collected, his first reaction was “Wowza.”

He gave us a letter detailing some of the issues that he had with the actions that were being done by members of the administration. Hiestand characterized the acts of the officials here at CCM as "extremely disturbing and raise serious legal concerns." I will conclude by reading a portion of the letter sent to us from Hiestand.

“The U.S. Supreme Court first explicitly recognized that public school students enjoy First Amendment protections in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* , 393 U.S. 503 (1969). Although the *Tinker* decision involved symbolic expression of high school students, the Court subsequently applied the same constitutional principles to a case involving censorship of a student publication at a public college. *Papish v. Board of Curators* , 410 U.S. 667 (1973). The Court again affirmed the strong First Amendment protections afforded college student publications when it struck down a decision by University of Virginia officials to withdraw school funding of a student publication solely because of its content. *Rosenberger v. University of Virginia* , 115 S. Ct. 2510 (1995).

Moreover, in a comprehensive and consistent body of case law that began even prior to the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Tinker* and that continues to this day, lower federal courts have made clear that First Amendment protections must be afforded to student media at public colleges and universities, even though the school may provide funds and facilities.

The law is clear: at a public college or university, the student editor is responsible for making all decisions regarding the editorial content in his or her student publication. School officials, while they may act in an advisory role, are required to exercise a strictly “hands-off”

approach. For example, those acting on the school's behalf, may not withdraw, withhold or limit funding, fire editors, fire student media advisers, censor articles or issues, "stack" a publications board, limit access to facilities or equipment or take any other action whose effect or intent is to mold, manipulate, punish or otherwise inhibit constitutionally protected expression.

Moreover, courts have been steadfast in holding that administrators cannot censor or otherwise take action against a student publication merely because they are unhappy with its content, be it for reasons of political views, physical appearance, or a fear of "inferior quality."

I have worked with the Student Press Law Center for about 30 years. Were the Youngtown Edition to follow Mr. Phelps directive to print on copy paper stapled together it would, as far as I know, have the inglorious distinction of being the only college student newspaper in the country to do so.

It is clear that CCM officials are in desperate need of a First Amendment refresher course. They have taken and threatened multiple actions that raise serious legal concerns, including their removal of your adviser and cuts to your budget for reasons that seem very clearly tied to their unhappiness with the journalism you are practicing. I urge you to share this information with CCM officials and ask that they reconsider their actions and work with you to amicably resolve your concerns. I cannot imagine that they want to find themselves the defendants in a First Amendment legal battle."