

## **Resolution No. 4**

Submitted by campus representatives on the SPJ Board

### **Support for free speech and free press rights for college journalists and their advisers**

Whereas, a free and vibrant press is critical to providing members of the American public with information they need to make important decisions in their lives, and

Whereas, press freedom in America is guaranteed through the free speech and free press provisions of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, and

Whereas the press in America includes all students who work as journalists at colleges and universities throughout the country, and

Whereas institutions of higher education have a vital role in promoting civil discourse and should encourage rather than stifle the free flow of information and ideas, and

Whereas institutions of higher learning have a responsibility to cultivate critical thought, robust public debate and an informed citizenry, and

Whereas, student journalists continue to face threats of censorship from administrators, government officials and others, and

Whereas, some advisers to student news media organizations at colleges and universities have been threatened, fired, suspended or otherwise punished for supporting the First Amendment rights of their students, and

Whereas the Academy should encourage diversity of thought rather than deter it,

Therefore, be it resolved that the Society of Professional Journalists in convention assembled in Las Vegas, Nev., for its 101st celebration of journalism urges administrators at institutions of higher education, public and private alike: to refrain from censoring student journalists; to actively defend the First Amendment rights of students journalists; and to support advisers who fight for student journalists' freedoms.

## **Resolution No. 5**

Submitted by SPJ FOI Committee

### **The need for FERPA reform**

Whereas, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, called “FERPA,” was intended to protect students from embarrassment by having financial aid information or academic records released to the public, and

Whereas, educational institutions from schools to universities have expanded the purview of FERPA beyond reason to make other types of records secret, including athletic budgets, parking tickets and school lunch menus, and

Whereas, the U.S. Department of Education interprets the law beyond its intent, thus allowing school officials to hide entire records, even with names redacted, if they suspect a journalist might identify someone named in the records, and

Whereas, a Columbus Dispatch 2009 investigation exposed the widespread confusion in applying FERPA and use of FERPA to hide records involving school finance, travel and malfeasance, and

Whereas, former Sen. James L. Buckley, who crafted FERPA, stated in the Columbus Dispatch series that “That’s not what we intended. The law needs to be revamped. Institutions are putting their own meaning into the law,” and

Whereas, campus record audits from throughout the country, including a 2008 audit in Georgia, demonstrated that educational institutions illegally keep records secret, often claiming FERPA as justification, and

Whereas, the public needs access to school records that shed light on government operations, such as budgets, school safety and performance,

Therefore, be it resolved that the Society of Professional Journalists in convention assembled in Las Vegas, Nev., for its 101st celebration of journalism urges Congress to clarify FERPA to exempt from disclosure only information that would explicitly link financial aid information, poor grades, non-criminal disciplinary records or other deficient academic performance with specific identifiable students, and

Be it further resolved that SPJ urges Congress to shift responsibility of the records portion of FERPA interpretation and implementation from the Department of Education to an agency more knowledgeable about records policies, such as the National Archives and Records Administration.