

KUOW Statement of Editorial Independence 9/11/2024

INTRODUCTION

KUOW, a vital unit of the University of Washington (UW), is managed by the independent 501c3 nonprofit corporation Puget Sound Public Radio (PSPR). Since its inaugural broadcast in 1952, KUOW has been central to UW's mission, embodying the university's commitment to education and public service through broadcasting as part of its broader academic and community goals.

With the FCC requirement that KUOW serve the community, the station naturally expands the University of Washington's (UW) outreach and connection with the community daily. This daily interaction not only enriches the lives of listeners but also solidifies the university's role as a central figure in public service. Through its wide-ranging programs, KUOW's commitment to public service extends the station's capacity to provide quality life-long learning experiences for the community, enhancing the university's broader mission.

Safeguarding the firewalls that protect the news department is crucial. The independence of the station's news department should not be compromised, as the integrity of the station will reflect positively upon the university if it is seen as fair and impartial. A station that maintains strong editorial independence reinforces public trust and, by extension, bolsters the university's reputation.

Continuous evaluation of KUOW's programming ensures the relevancy and viability of all offerings, keeping the content aligned with the evolving needs and interests of the community. This process of evaluation, combined with unwavering editorial independence, is essential to maintaining the station's and the university's credibility.

RATIONALE FOR UW ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT

In today's rapidly evolving media landscape, where the integrity of news is increasingly threatened by emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, deepfakes, and misinformation campaigns, it is more crucial than ever for institutions like the University of Washington to uphold strong editorial independence for its media outlets. By endorsing this policy, the UW administration not only reinforces its commitment to safeguarding First Amendment protections, but also preserves the credibility and trustworthiness of its associated media outlets in an era where public skepticism about news sources is rising.

AI-generated content and other modern threats can undermine public trust in media if not rigorously checked by established editorial standards and ethical journalism practices. By ensuring that KUOW operates with full editorial independence, the UW administration safeguards the station's ability to resist undue influence and uphold the highest standards of journalism, thereby preserving the integrity of both the university and the station.

Furthermore, supporting this policy aligns with the University of Washington's broader mission to foster informed citizenship, academic freedom, and public service. This commitment to editorial independence demonstrates to the public, students, faculty, and staff that the university is dedicated to maintaining the highest standards of truth and integrity in all its communications, thus strengthening its reputation as a leading public research institution.

SEPARATION OF JOURNALISM AND UNIVERSITY OVERSIGHT

KUOW's newsroom and content decisions operate independently of University of Washington oversight, despite many internal practices being subject to university policies. As a primarily self-sustaining service, KUOW relies on community funding, with over 90% of its support coming from individual contributors and local businesses who believe in the power of an informed public to strengthen the community.

As an independent journalism enterprise, KUOW has established comprehensive editorial policies, ethical standards, and practices to guide its work. The station's news teams, podcasts, and content units deliver fair, intelligent, and independent journalism, connecting the Puget Sound Region to the world. KUOW, alongside UW and Puget Sound Public Radio, is committed to adhering to the legal and constitutional frameworks governing public broadcasting, ensuring its mission to empower and inform the community is upheld. Each and every KUOW policy, standard, and practice in this regard meets or exceeds industry newsroom, programming, and editorial standards.

STATEMENT OF POLICY

KUOW's programming is central to its mission and the primary way audiences assess the station's value. Public trust in KUOW hinges on the assurance that its programming is free from undue influence. Also, KUOW relies on funding from individual and corporate contributions, and state and federal sources. The University of Washington (UW) and Puget Sound Public Radio (PSPR) are responsible for ensuring that these funds are used appropriately, and that oversight does not interfere with the integrity of the programming process. This policy affirms KUOW's journalistic independence.

We are committed to safeguarding the independence and integrity of KUOW's programming and journalistic content. This commitment ensures that professional journalists at KUOW can apply a free and independent decision-making process that serves the needs and interests of all.

As public broadcasters, KUOW, UW, and PSPR function as trustees of a vital public service. Our programming is designed to educate, enlighten, and engage the public with the highest standards of professionalism and quality. This noncommercial enterprise reflects the purpose of federal and state

governments to provide education and cultural enrichment. UW and PSPR are devoted to maintaining public confidence in the editorial independence of KUOW's news and programming.

Public broadcasting stations, including KUOW, operate under various federal and state legal and regulatory requirements and are protected by the First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of the press. All parties involved in KUOW's operations must respect these legal frameworks to preserve the station's independence.

Among the practical implications that flow from these principles are the following:

- Decisions about programming are the responsibility of station management.
- Selection and treatment of news is the responsibility of the station's news leadership staff.
- Ascertainment of community "interest, convenience, and necessity," in relationship to programming is the responsibility of station management.
- Compliance with applicable university policies and state/federal laws and regulations will be ascertained by the university in good faith.
- Editorial independence does not include illegal or unlawful conduct.
- University leadership or personnel reasonably conducting their duties does not constitute undue influence.

This policy reaffirms KUOW's journalistic and programming independence, grounded in the historic principles of public broadcaster autonomy as outlined in the 1986 "Statement of Principles of Editorial Integrity in Public Broadcasting."