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Facing Journalism's Challenges When Many Often View News as Fake

By Nicole Wills
UCF Forum columnist
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When I tell someone that I'm editor-in-chief of an online magazine, people generally are either impressed, ambivalent or concerned. Impressed or ambivalent used to be the most common, but increasingly their reactions have been mostly of concern.

Often it all comes back to one question: "What about 'fake' news?"

It's certainly true that the rampant perception of fake news has impacted me and my team of writers at [Her Campus at UCF](#), a student publication. Feeling that a significant portion of society devalues your work simply because it originates from a journalistic

publication is disheartening, to say the least. However, the increase in scrutiny has also resulted in an insatiable drive to defy these negative perceptions and produce work of an even higher caliber than before.

As the adage goes, the best defense is a good offense. Working as the head of a publication has taught me that the best offensive strategy against invasive fake news is to keep the [principles of ethical journalism](#) at the forefront of writers' minds: truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness and public accountability.

To counteract fake news, we emphasize these principles whenever we welcome a new staffer to the team, and we reiterate them to all of our staff on a regular basis to make sure the principles are upheld.

We always try to bring the discussion back to these key principles that form the foundation of our mission as journalists: to empower our audience with information.

For example, our team hosts workshops throughout the year where we discuss the many aspects of writing for a publication: pitching, adhering to Associated Press style and interviewing sources, to name a few. Whatever the workshop's subject matter might be, we always try to bring the discussion back to these key principles that form the foundation of our mission as journalists: to empower our audience with information.

Perhaps most importantly, our editing team – like other legitimate journalists – makes it a priority to hold stories to the highest ethical standards. *Her Campus at UCF* is an online publication written by college women for college women, but don't let that description fool you. From recaps of campus events to in-depth interviews with candidates for student government, every article we publish is scrutinized to ensure it adheres to the principles of ethical journalism.

Credibility takes years to establish, but all it takes is one misattributed quote or incorrect statistic to chip away at that hard-earned reputation.

Take one of our recently published articles, for example: "[5 Popular Health Trends That Are Actually Dangerous](#)." Although writers should strive for all of their articles to meet the highest ethical standards, it's especially essential to do so when it comes to those focused on health and wellness. As Mark Twain once said: "Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint."

In this case, the *Her Campus* writer and editing team ensured that credible sources – such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – were consulted for the piece. We also, obviously, encouraged readers to consult their doctors before making any decisions that could affect their health.

No matter the subject of the article, I take my role as editor in chief very seriously – even if we're viewed as just a college publication. I have the privilege – and responsibility – to set an example for my team. And if any of our writers go on to become a professional

journalist, I feel confident that they'll be prepared to meet head on the challenges presented in the era of fake news with pen in hand and principles in mind.

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