

Journalism Adviser Blows the Whistle on the College President:

An Ethical Case Study

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Abstract

Last spring, the campus of Hutchinson Community College in Hutchinson, Kansas, became the scene of a First Amendment battle. It started with the publishing of a story critical of the college president and administration as it detailed efforts to destroy the professional and personal life a veteran, 30-year professor. The administration was trying to cover it up, but journalism adviser Alan Montgomery blew the whistle on the administration's misdeeds. Besides also helping coach the writing of the articles, Montgomery also served as the stories' main source in his capacity as faculty union co-president. He knew all the details of the case, and he used the situation as a live-teaching example in his journalism classes. When the administration continued to stonewall the faculty union, Montgomery turned the story over to his students. This resulted in a series of stories, the attacked professor's name being cleared, the threat of suspension to the student journalists, the locking of the journalism lab, the confiscation of the newspaper, and the suspension and subsequent firing of Montgomery. Ethical landmines filled the situation. This case study examines the situation through the lens of the Potter Box Model of Reasoning and uses Mill's Principle of Utility, Kant's Categorical Imperative, Islam's Divine Commands, and communitarianism to unpack Montgomery's decisions to blow the whistle on the administration.

Keywords: academic freedom, Alan Montgomery, civil rights, communitarianism,

Constitutional rights, ethics, First Amendment, Hutchinson Community College, journalism

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Journalism education is important for a democratic society (Bobkowski & Miller, 2016). This is proven by the fact students involved in scholastic journalism consistently perform higher when judged against standard testing practices (Dvorak, Bowen, & Choi, 2009; Roschke, 2009). Social engagement, specifically relating to media literacy and understanding of messaging, is increased when students are involved in journalism programs (Marchi, 2012). However, if the students are part of a minority race and the income of their parents is low, this can be affected (Amster, 2006). Furthermore, students exposed to journalism education show more understanding of and participation in politics at all levels (Bobkowski, Goodman, & Bowen, 2012). Researchers looking into social and civic engagement point to these two types of engagement as being closely related, which means they should be considered in tandem with each other (Campbell, 2006). Being able to engage effectively, though, requires understanding how to make decisions. Beyond learning how to make news judgements, students need to learn how to navigate the murky world of ethical considerations.

Students have First Amendment rights, despite what some administrators or other adults may believe (LoMonte, Goldstein, & Hiestand, 2013). It is the job of educators, at all levels, to teach skills and knowledge associated with journalism so that power is wielded properly. Instructors must be advocates for student journalists and practice sound advising techniques that protect those rights and allow student journalists to function as professional journalists, even if administration pays for a portion of the publication costs (Kopenhaver, 1984). Methods of instruction vary, but the same goal is held by all educators. This is particularly important in a

world of ever-changing technology. Educators must adapt to give students the skills needed in the current employment marketplace (Briggs, 2007).

This puts journalism advisers in a unique situation. On one hand, they are employed by an educational institute. They know information about students and faculty that may not be public information or is protected by privacy rights. On the other hand, they are charged with teaching aspiring journalists how to be journalists, which involves reporting information and serving the public's interest. When the administration works to cover up wrong doing by other faculty members, journalism advisers must decide whether to protect their jobs or teach their students to report the truth. This case study examines such a situation through the lens of the Potter Box Model of Reasoning and uses Mill's Principle of Utility, Kant's Categorical Imperative, Islam's Divine Commands, and communitarianism to unpack an adviser's decisions to blow the whistle on the administration.

The Definition:

Journalism Under Fire

In middle of Kansas, a battle of First Amendment proportions is smoldering, and it all hinges on the ethical decisions made by Alan Montgomery, the journalism adviser at Hutchinson Community College for the past 17 years. The controversy started with the Dec. 2, 2016, edition of HCC's weekly newspaper, *The Collegian*. The publication ran a series of stories highlighting the college president, Carter File, and other members of the administration actively engaging in a cover up to protect a faculty member who had denigrated a fellow educator (Montgomery, 2017). Specifically, the article, written by journalism student Jeff Leddy, "detailed a conflict between a professor and the college's online education director" (Bauer-Wolf, 2017, n.p.). In the stories, Montgomery was the source, and he also helped the students write and edit the articles

(Stewart, 2017). An investigation by the college's faculty union, which Montgomery serves as co-president, ensued (Bauer-Wolf, 2017).

In the lead-up to publishing the stories, the situation unfolded before Montgomery. A 30-year, distinguished professor was under attack, and the faculty union was trying to get to the bottom of what was taking place (Montgomery, 2017). However, the president and the administration were not making that easy. Montgomery (2017) said the entire situation was filled with controversy and layers of coverup and deceit in which the "powerful people" were trying to "protect their own asses." The situation revolved around a sticky note, which was deemed "an official 'interoffice communication,'" that Allied Health Professor Becky Hageman found and picked up (Leddy, 2016, p. 1). The note's subject was Hageman herself, and it contained disparaging remarks (Leddy, 2016).

When Montgomery (2017) caught wind of this, he has his fellow faculty union members began to investigate, which led to several meetings with the president and other administrative personnel. In his efforts to clear the name of Hageman, Montgomery reached out to HCC Online Education Director Rhonda Corwin, in which who's office area the sticky note was found. After send two emails to set up a meeting to discuss the situation, Corwin filed a police report alleging harassment by Montgomery (Reynolds, 2016). Eventually, President File cleared the named of Hageman (Leddy, 2016). The police report against Montgomery went no where as the police officers deemed it not worth pursuing (Reynolds, 2016). Even so, Montgomery (2017) said the situation caused concerns for him in terms of how the administration was behaving. That is when he gave his student journalists the green light to report the story. Montgomery supplied the journalists with interviews and emails concerning the situation. The administration provided few comments.

Throughout the process, Montgomery (2017) had been using the situation as a “live teaching example for weeks on the topics of abuse of power and First Amendment rights.” This was not the first time Montgomery had used such tactics to teach tenets of journalism and Constitutional rights. On Nov. 3, 2016, in advance of the Nov. 8 presidential elections, he hosted a 60s style rally on the Hutchinson Community College campus, complete with hand-made signs, speeches and rock music of the 1960s (Frank, 2016). “Montgomery spoke from the podium encouraging students to come up and stump for their candidate [. . .] Montgomery said the rally was also to remind everyone of their first amendment rights to assemble and say what you want without fear. Montgomery encouraged students to resist any candidate that would try to take those rights away” (Frank, 2016, n.p.).

When it came time to publish the Dec. 2, 2016, edition of *The Collegian*, the construction of the packages the paper used was intentional. First, the style of writing mimicked Hunter S. Thompson, of Gonzo journalism fame. Montgomery (2017) said they were studying Thompson at the time, and the bizarre nature of the story they were reporting fit well with Thompson’s style, so the students elected to utilize the form of writing. Second, the design of the issue harkened back to journalism history. “The front page was patterned, in part, off of 1800s war headlines, with big decks. The ‘False Accusations’ head was inspired by ‘J’Accuse (I accuse)’ goat headline in a major French newspaper, *L’Aurore*, back in the 1890s, in the Dreyfus Affair, when famous author Emile Zola accused some top military leaders in France of conspiring to frame, charge and convict a heroic French Army captain of treason, for allegedly leaking secrets to the Germans. Zola exposed the plot, the frame-up and wrote a several-thousand-word story, under that J’Accuse headline. Dreyfus was freed and continued a distinguished military career” (Montgomery, 2017).

After publication of the stories, the focus of the controversy became The Collegian, the adviser and the student journalists. Leddy, a United State Marine Corps veteran, and Collegian editor-in-chief LoriBeth Reynolds were the two students who did the bulk of the reporting, and they soon found themselves under scrutiny by the college president and administration (Montgomery, 2017). “Leddy and other students were brought up on disciplinary charges, including academic dishonesty. The college asked Leddy and other students to sign immunity letters that would bar them from talking about the proceeding in the future. He and other students refused to sign the agreements” (Janney, 2017, n.p.). The immunity agreements “would have imposed a gag order and required them to turn over their reporting notes” (Hegeman, 2017, n.p.).

Montgomery has been accused of writing the articles himself, which is where Leddy’s charges of academic dishonesty stemmed from because the administration believed he put his name on an article written by his journalism adviser (Hegeman, 2017). He denies such claims (Montgomery, 2017). In the face of this, Montgomery (2017) retained legal counsel with money from his personal retirement fund, and he even suggested the students take the immunity deal because he didn’t want them to jeopardize their educations, especially Leddy who was receiving education under the G.I. Bill.

The students and adviser being unwilling to bend allowed them to continue reporting on the situation. With two issues remaining for the Spring 2017 semester, the journalists planned another issue filled information concerning the actions of the administration (Montgomery, 2017). However, the first installment almost never saw the light of day. As many as 400 copies of the April 28 issue were confiscated by campus security when Leddy and Reynolds attempted to distribute the paper around campus (Janney, 2017). Montgomery (2017) estimated the number to much higher, closer to 950 copies of the 1,200-copy press run for the April 28 issue. “Frank

LoMonte, executive director of the Student Press Law Center, said that nothing short of leaking confidential military plans can justify leaders preventing publication of a newspaper” (Bauer-Wolf, 2017, n.p.).

Furthermore, journalism classes were cancelled for the rest of the semester and Montgomery was suspended (Kansas College Ends Journalism Classes Prematurely, 2017). Final grades for journalism students were to be given based upon completed work (Goldstein, 2017; Horwath, 2017). This also meant the final edition of the Collegian was cancelled (Parton, 2017). The first indication all of this was happening took place when students arrived at the Collegian’s computer lab and classroom to find the doors locked (Pedraza, 2017). Montgomery (2017) said the confiscated issue contained a story about a work-study student being kicked out of the journalism lab under strange directives from President File, even though work-study students are used in the same capacity throughout campus, and another story detailed Montgomery’s letter to the U.S. Attorney’s Office asking for an investigation into civil rights violations. Montgomery said, “The student newspaper put sunshine on these issues, and they are like vampires spitting and squealing all over the place” (as cited in Bauer-Wolf, 2017, n.p.).

Eventually, the April 28 edition was distributed by Student Government members under the direct of President File (Horwath, 2017). Also, facing scrutiny from the community and news coverage of what was transpiring, the May 5 edition, previously cancelled, was reinstated, and President File said the initial cancellation stemmed from the fact the administration “didn’t think it would be possible to publish it” (as cited in Elliott, 2017, n.p.). “But if the college thought students couldn’t publish without an adviser, the decision not to appoint an interim adviser suggests an intent to shutter the publication” (Goldstein, 2017, n.p.). Even with it being published, the final edition did not have all the stories it was intended to have. The students,

fearing further retribution, elected to withhold some of the coverage on the situation, which was understandable (Montgomery, 2017).

The Kansas City Press Club expressed support for the situation the students at HCC are facing. President Mark Reddig (2017) and the rest of executive board said, “we were disturbed by the initial reports that administrators worked so swiftly to suppress the First Amendment rights of the student employees who work so hard to cover their campus each and every day. We do remain dismayed that administration has deprived journalism students of a full semester of the department’s courses. We are even more concerned that administration has offered no reason for this cancellation” (n.p.). Kansas Collegiate Media also voiced its backing of the students. President Stacy Sparks said, “Seizure of newspapers is an obvious violation of the First Amendment as is cancelling the final issue of the *Collegian*. We support due process for the fair review of facts before coming to a determination regarding the suspension of Alan Montgomery” (as cited in Elliott, 2017, n.p.). The due process proceedings are underway. A federal mediator is stepping in to address Montgomery’s claims that “the administration’s actions interfere with contractually guaranteed provisions for academic freedom and involve threats of disciplinary proceedings to intimidate students” (Hegeman, 2017, n.p.).

The future of the *Collegian* and journalism at HCC remains up in the air. Reynolds graduated from HCC in the spring (Anderson, 2017). Leddy, a freshman during this ordeal, is electing not to return to HCC for his sophomore year (Pedraza, 2017). Leddy said, “I do not feel welcome here, especially when i don’t know what is happening. There is an air of hostility and suspicion and the constant targeting of us at the student publication” (as cited in Janney, 2017, n.p.).

HCC might even see a drop in enrollment for its journalism program in the coming

academic year as the situation has cast a pall over journalism on the campus (Goldstein, 2017; Montgomery, 2017). As for Montgomery, his suspension has been turned into something more. He has been effectively fired. On May 16, the Board of Trustees of HCC voted to not renew Montgomery's contract after a 40-minute closed session of a special meeting during which no other action was taken (Montgomery, 2017; Stewart, 2017). Montgomery (2017) is fighting the decision through his rights of due process. "The due-process system requires the college have 'just cause' to nonrenew a contract [. . .] and that cause cannot be based on exercising his right to free speech" (Stewart, 2017, n.p.). Montgomery (2017) is currently waiting for the due-process system to run its course. He said he is looking into unemployment and other ways to have income while everything is sorted out (Montgomery, 2017).

The Values:

Holding Those In Power Accountable For Their Actions

In the HCC situation, several values were at play. He held civil rights and human dignity, the First Amendment, and academic freedom in high regard. As such, Montgomery (2017) said what he has experienced during the Spring 2017 semester is unprecedented for him and for Hutchinson Community College. "I've never seen anything like this before. I've been involved in journalism for 40 years. I'm wondering if a college president has ever just locked access to their school's newspaper" (Horwath, 2017, n.p.). Montgomery (2017) said he felt he had no choice but to turn his journalism students loose on the story because in his capacity as a faculty union co-president, he was not being allowed to ask questions as President File continually protected his "toadies." "I was in it chin-deep for about 50 days straight. It was really pretty stressful, and it put some hard miles on me, on other union members and the administrators who tried to keep us out of it. I just decided it was time to air this thing out. The stink was getting to

be overpowering. It was time to report the helpful things that occurred at the meeting, helping to clear the professor's name, as well as report the saga . . . every stinking, disgraceful, faculty-hating event" (Montgomery, 2017).

Some have questioned if Montgomery should have been blown the whistle on what was occurring, though. After all, he wore two different hats at the time — journalism adviser and representative of the faculty. "Montgomery, who was co-president of the faculty union at the time, was quoted in the story. But as the paper's faculty adviser, he also edited the stories and coached the students writing them" (Hegeman, 2017, n.p.). Montgomery (2017) said he was doing exactly what he should as the journalism adviser because he was teaching concepts about civil and First Amendment rights, and he is a reporting, writing and design coach. Montgomery (2017) said his suspension and subsequent firing send a message that doing the job he was hired to do is fine as long as he doesn't cross the administration. Such an unspoken understanding chills First Amendment rights and goes against everything journalism stands for. As journalist and humorist Finley Peter Dunne's fictional bartender Mr. Dooley is attributed to saying, "The job of the newspaper is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable" (Shedden, 2014, n.p.).

The question has been posed to Montgomery if he violated any privacy rules or told the students anything he should not have revealed. Montgomery (2017) said none of the meetings were private and "no one had signed any secrecy agreements." In the eyes of Montgomery, the administration, led by President File, were trampling on the civil rights of a faculty member. That warranted exposing. Then, the controversy grew as the student journalists became targets, and their First Amendment rights were hindered. Frank LoMonte, executive director of the Student Press Law Center, agrees. He said, "It's fine for the administration to be upset about an

article. But you can't stop production of a newspaper because of it, and you certainly can't confiscate the newspapers. They're gift-wrapping a First Amendment claim. A student journalist's ability to publish content is not dependent on having someone up above signing off on it. The issue of approving the content before allowing the papers to be distributed is prior restraint and is not constitutional" (as cited in Parton, 2017, n.p.). The actions of the administration hindered Montgomery's ability to teach due to the chill of free speech that permeated the campus (Montgomery, 2017). Montgomery said "the students were living in fear" (as cited in Hegeman, 2017, n.p.).

With the reputation of a 30-year, distinguished professor, the rights of student journalists, and the academic freedom to teach a content area at stake, Montgomery (2017) believes he acted in the best manner possible. The information he gave his students was not secret by any recognizable measure as the meetings and emails were not part of any confidential arrangement. Furthermore, Montgomery was demonstrating good journalism by reporting information the campus community would deem newsworthy and worth knowing as the educational institution is a public entity, operating with tax-payer and student-tuition dollars. Montgomery (2017) said he talked with journalism colleagues, both former editors and current academic peers, and no one indicated he was violating any ethical boundaries, and he remains resolute in the belief that all the actions by him and his students are protected by the First Amendment.

The Principles:

Journalism Serving the Good of the Community

The legality of what Montgomery's and the administration's actions are being sorted out through the due-process system. However, the underlining issue is whether the actions were ethical. President File and the administration has repeatedly declined to comment on different

aspects of the situation (Bauer-Wolf, 2017; Hegeman, 2017; Horwath, 2017; Janney, 2017; Pedraza, 2017). This is to be expected and is truly outside the scope inquiry. The heart of the matter is if Montgomery acted ethically because his decisions to blow the whistle on the administration ultimately lead to the situation currently taking place on the HCC campus.

Montgomery's actions fit into several models of ethical theory. The easiest of which to apply is Mill's Principle of Utility. This theory suggests determining what is right or wrong comes down to "what will yield the best consequences for the welfare of human beings [because what] matters ultimately in determining the right and wrong choice is the amount of good promoted and evil restrained" (Christians, Fackler, Richardson, Kreshel, & Woods, 2012, p. 15). Montgomery (2017) said he had to blow the whistle on what was happening because the treatment of the professor was wrong. Furthermore, Montgomery's actions to protect his students by seeking legal counsel also fits into this theoretical framework. He was doing what is right and trying to help his students avoid being suspended or expelled from college (Bauer-Wolf, 2017; Goldstein, 2017).

Kant's Categorical Imperative is also applicable in the case of Montgomery. This calls for a decision maker to seek out the conclusion fits all situations because "what is right for one is right for all" (Christians et al, 2012, p. 12). Montgomery believed the treatment of one faculty member was wrong, so he could not sit by and allow the actions to continue. For if he did, others could be impacted. Also, Montgomery (2017) felt his academic freedoms were being infringed upon because it changed the way he was able to teach. By making the decision to be a source for his student journalists, he was aiming to keep academic freedom viable on the campus. Likewise, in standing up for his students, Montgomery sought to ensure First Amendment rights for those students and all students on the campus — past, present, and future. This is important because

the students in this case were questioned by the administration for their participation in the articles, and “the prospect of being called into a meeting for engaging in speech protected by the First Amendment creates a chilling effect on that speech” (Goldstein, 2017, n.p.).

Another ethical theory fitting for the situation at HCC is Islam’s Divine Commands. This ethical theory contains three tenets in which there is a clear right decision to be made and a wrong decision to be prevented (Christians et al, 2012). Montgomery’s decision plays into all three of these tenets. This is because the Islam ethical theory holds “justice, human dignity, and truth are divine commands” (Christians et al, 2012, p. 14). When it came to the situation with the administration degrading and, as Montgomery (2017) characterized it, bullying a fellow faculty member, he felt he had to achieve justice for the individual. Likewise, he pursued justice for his students, just as he pursues justice for himself by fighting his suspension and subsequent firing. Also, with the faculty member being bullied, she was being stripped of her human dignity. Montgomery fought for this by taking the course of action he did. His students were also being treated without dignity as they were brought into meetings with the administration and threatened with disciplinary action. Most importantly, though, Montgomery sought the truth in this situation. He chose to blow the whistle on what was taking place because the truth was of chief concern. Everyone on campus deserved to know the truth, for better or worse. Montgomery embodied the concept of Islam’s Divine Commands because “following these principles brings fulfillment and well-being to societies everywhere” (Christians et al, 2012, p. 15).

Perhaps the most compelling ethical theory relating to the situation at HCC, though, is communitarianism. All decisions made aimed to serve the community in which the Collegian existed. The ethical theory of communitarianism holds the individual is part of a larger entity, which is society (Christians, 2006). Furthermore, the theory suggests “the individual is

interdependent with the group” in which he or she exists (Coleman, 2000, p. 42). As such, decisions should be made with the collective in mind. Christians (2016) explains the core of communitarianism is “our obligations to one another, rather than individual rights is the integrating norm. The moral life develops through community formation and not in personal rationality. Communitarianism is a way of thinking about law and media ethics that turns our attention away from prerogatives of the self, and centers instead on the socio-cultural matrix in which we gather all we know about the good” (n.p.). Everything Montgomery did served the community in which he lived and worked. He put others before himself. He sought to protect his colleague and his students because success for them means success for him. They are all part of the same community, and without each other, the community does not operate smoothly. To uphold the ideals of academic freedom, civil rights, and journalism and the First Amendment, Montgomery took actions to best serve his community, even while putting his own professional life at risk. He did nothing for his own gain. He was selfless in his pursuits to achieve vindication for a fellow faculty member and his students’ education.

The Loyalties:

Comforting the Afflicted

The situation unfolding at HCC contains many players. The most prevalent are Montgomery and President File. However, the other cast members are just as important. All had loyalties at play, both to others and to their own ideals.

The faculty member who was under fire was loyal to HCC. She was a kind and soft-spoken person (Montgomery, 2017). The treatment she received was clearly seen as a betrayal. It also caused embarrassment, which is why she didn’t immediately tell any of her colleagues about the initial sticky note she found that contained disparaging remarks about her, nor about being

falsely labeled a thief and being banned from an instructional area by administration (Montgomery, 2017).

The journalism students who did the bulk of the reporting on the situation also had loyalties. They respected the institution of journalism. They respected their journalism adviser. To these two things, they were most loyal because both espoused ideals of truth-telling and freedom of expression. Yet these loyalties were tested in the face of expulsion. Ultimately they held to their ideals and continued to do the work of journalism. They served their readers, and so their loyalties represented the loyalties of the newspaper. They continued to produce issues and distribute the copies, even when campus security personnel confiscated the press run and essentially attempted to censure the journalists (Pedraza, 2017). President File said this particular aspect of the situation was a misunderstanding (Goldstein, 2017). However, it underlines the journalists' loyalty to journalism as they stood up to an authority figure in an effort to maintain their First Amendment rights.

President File's loyalties were multifaceted. As the president, he has a vested interest in the public image and operation of the college. He had to be careful about how he discussed the situation as it related to Montgomery because it was a personnel issue (Bauer-Wolf, 2017). He also had to be careful about discussing the students due to privacy reasons. He said there he didn't think there would be any "adverse actions" toward the students (as cited in Bauer-Wolf, 2017, n.p.). The phrasing of this is telling of his loyalties to the college because he did not want to prematurely shut the door on any disciplinary actions. Not giving a definite answer is interesting because, "after all, it's not as though he's the president of the institution and could just direct his employees to stop an abusive investigation, or something" (Goldstein, 2017, n.p.). He was also showing loyalty to his employees. He was going out of his way to protect the employees accused

of participating in the maltreatment of the faculty member and the students (Montgomery, 2017). When bad press began to confront him and the college, his loyalty of self preservation also kicked in. Not only did he need to continue to protect the image of the college, but he also needed to protect himself. There was obviously the risk of blowback in this situation. He had to be loyal to his own career and work to mitigate any risks coming his way.

Montgomery's loyalties were also multifaceted. As the co-president of the faculty union, he had an obligation to serve his constituents. When a faculty member is being treated unfairly or worse, it is his duty to take actions to protect that faculty member. Generally this would entail working with the administration to come to a suitable resolution. However, when the administration does not respond to such attempts, a person in Montgomery's position must take different actions, such as speaking out to the press to bring the story to light. This also relates to his loyalty to his profession. He was hired to teach journalism, and part of teaching journalism is reporting truth to power. He modeled how to comfort the afflicted by exposing the wrongdoing of those in power. He blew the whistle on President File and the rest of the administration. He also coached the students in producing the stories, which is part of his duties as a journalism adviser. This demonstrates his loyalty to his profession, which underscores his loyalty to the First Amendment. He exercised his rights by speaking out, and he helped the students exercise their rights to a free press by helping them report what was happening. As the situation devolved, it began to impact his ability to teach his subject area. His speaking out highlights his loyalty to academic freedom. No educator should be prevented from teaching because doing so damages the community of academia. In all aspects, Montgomery remained loyal to all communities of which he is a member. This happened despite the fact he knew he could be putting himself in the line of fire. "I am still kind of whistling in the graveyard, wondering how much flack I will ultimately

get for this. They can come at me from a variety of angles, in ways veiled by course requirements, loads, class sizes, et cetera . . . if they decide to just cut the journalism program here, at some point” (Montgomery, 2017).

Conclusion:

Instructor Makes Ethical Choices

The situation at HCC is far from resolved. The student reporters have moved on from the Collegian. The president is still serving in his role. The due process proceedings are still underway. Though Montgomery’s contract was not renewed, to date there has been no job posting by HCC to fill the position. This creates the question of whether the Collegian will even continue to exist.

Montgomery (2017) is looking forward to getting back to work, but he doesn’t know how the timeline of the due process proceedings will ultimately shake out. All he can do at this point is allow the process to run its course and consider if the decisions he made will stand up to the test of time. He believes he acted justly, in line with ethical concepts and the First Amendment (Montgomery, 2017). He spoke out to give a voice to the voiceless, and he stood up for the rights of himself and his students guaranteed by the First Amendment. Though the fact he was a source in the explosive stories might be viewed as being questionable, he went on the record when neither the administration nor anyone else would. He shined a light on what has happening. Having to then coach the students on the coverage, including helping direct the writing process, is simply part of his job. If another faculty member had been the one to reveal information to the journalists, the number of dissenting voices would be fewer. The optics would be different.

However, since he was the journalism adviser, he had an obligation to his students, just as he had an obligation to his fellow faculty members to expose what President File and the

administration were doing to denigrate an educator. “This thing was huge. It really dwarfs anything I had been involved in a daily newspaper, in terms of stress, threats against me, an attempt to get me arrested, et cetera. Yea, it was quite a rodeo.”

Perhaps inflammatory phrases, such as one that suggested President File “seemed more nervous than a Muslim at a Trump rally” when he was asked questions concerning the police report filed against Montgomery, could have been avoided (Reynolds, 2016, p. 1). However, if Montgomery had instructed his students to not write such words, he would have been infringing upon their First Amendment rights, the very rights he has sought to protect during the entire ordeal. As a veteran newspaper reporter, it seems unlikely Montgomery would use such language if he had, as some suggested, written the stories himself. It would run counter to his professionalism as a journalist. Furthermore, though the use of such language by the students could be debated, the students were studying Hunter S. Thompson at the time, so the style in which the reports were written understandably mimic the Gonzo journalist.

Montgomery made tough, but ethically sound, decisions. He acted in best interest of all stake holders. After all, nothing a person does is done in a vacuum. Everyone is part of a society or community, regardless if the definition for community one adopts is on a macro or micro scale. He sought to serve the community in the best way possible. In any instance hindsight can suggest other ways to handle a situation, but even looking at the case with the benefit of elapsed time, Montgomery’s decisions hold up.

Montgomery held to his values of civil rights, academic freedom, and the First Amendment. He remained loyal to his communities by working to provide justice, dignity, and truth to the communities of which he is a part. He saw the public’s right to know outweighed other considerations, and he did not allow his own self-interest to get in the way. As Coleman

(2000) points out, “[i]f communication serves a public purpose, then it must be secondary to individual rights” (p. 45). That is journalism. Information dispersal and the public’s right to know are of chief importance.

Montgomery recognizes the situation is not over, and he admits it may not ultimately end favorably (Montgomery, 2017). However, he stands by his decision, as he should. “I may be accused of not being willing to let this go. We are just trying to bring some parts of it into sharp focus. As the stories pointed out, the reputation and self-esteem of a veteran, 30-year professor was being destroyed” (Montgomery, 2017).

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