

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES: EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT TIPS AND TOOLS

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2006 ISSUES AND INITIATIVES

September, 2006

Dear Student Organization Representatives:

Welcome Back to another exciting year! It is my hope that you will be successful in realizing your organization's mission and goals. The Office of Student Activities and Leadership (SAL) is here to help you do just that.

There are many important campus, community, national and international issues that affect students. Some of your organizations will be more involved in these issues than others. Of utmost importance, however, is that all groups and students feel that the campus community is a safe place for everyone. It is important for all of us to be active in creating an environment where all viewpoints may be expressed. The University is in the business of generating discussion and dialogue. Student Organizations are often an effective vehicle for creating campus community discussion around important issues.

Over the course of the year, your organization's mission may compel you to engage in both public and private discussion about complex and controversial issues. These conversations may range from enlisting support for relief efforts to discussion around the upcoming election (ballot measures, candidates, voter registration, etc.), and may also include international conflicts such as the Middle East.

In order to maximize your organization's effectiveness in public conversations the following resources are available online at studentorgs.umich.edu. In addition I hope you will take advantage of the following websites/ resources when planning your student organization events and activities:

- Division of Student Affairs: "Student Matters"
 - http://uis.umich.edu/student_matters/index.cfm
- Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT)
 - <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/>
- Expect Respect: Give it! Get it!
 - www.urespect.umich.edu (Also can be found on the U-M Gateway)
- LSA Theme Year for '06 - '07: "The Theory and Practice of Citizenship"
 - www.lsa.umich.edu/latheme/citizenship/index.htm
- Information on Ballot Proposal 2: The Michigan Civil Rights Initiative
 - www.umich.edu/news/index.html?Releases?2006/May06/ballot_proposal
- The Center for the Education of Women (CEW):
 - www.umich.edu/~cew

As you plan your programs and events, please consider ways in which you might maximize *dialogue* regarding complex issues, rather than debate only; how can your organizations promote mind expansion, rather than mind numbing or polarizing issues? For ideas and support in designing these kinds of events consider contacting the following offices as potential resources:

- Ginsberg Center for Community Service & Learning: 647-7402
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Affairs (LGBT): 763-4186
- Multi-Ethnic Student Affairs (MESA): 763-9044
- Student Activities and Leadership (SAL): 763-5900
- The Program on Intergroup Relation (IGR): 936-1875

I hope you find this information useful. To provide additional resources and/ or feedback, please contact the office of Student Activities and Leadership (SAL): 763-5900.

Wishing you a full and successful year!
Sincerely,

Susan A. Wilson
Director,
Student Activities and Leadership

DIALOGUE

This packet is meant to give you some resources for facilitating conversation. This information is not topic specific, but rather will provide you with a guide for facilitation, in general. Included in this packet, you'll find three types of documents: 1) differences between debate and dialogue, and dialogue and discussion as methods of organizing thoughts, 2) tips and skills for facilitating dialogue, and 3) two sets of sample ground rules for dialogue.

Debate vs. Dialogue vs. Discussion:

These documents are meant to spark thinking about the differences between formats. The comparison tables (between debate and dialogue, and dialogue and discussion) provide a lot of insight as to the advantages and disadvantages of each form. Each of these are valuable and your decision will depend on the event's goals, audience, time, interpersonal comfort, and other variables. Read these tables carefully, to fully understand the different structures.

It is also important to note that some events that begin as (for example) dialogues can develop characteristics of a debate. What does this mean?

Some times, participants will become very passionate about their opinions, and begin to converse in a way that seems competitive or combative in nature. Also, differences in communication style can sometimes lead to a heightened hostility towards each other. This can be described, also, as a debate, and may take away from the benefits of a dialogue. If you sense that this sort of debate is beginning to occur, it is best to try to interrupt it.

Why is it so important to stop these sorts of interactions? If participants feel threatened or that their opinions will be challenged in a hostile manner, they are less likely to participate and engage in the material. Also, for those who are acting competitively and combatively, they will be less likely to hear and listen to the thoughts that other participants are expressing.

So, if you are trying to construct a dialogue and the interactions become competitive, how do you interrupt this? Well, there are several ways to do this:

- Call it to people's attention. Sometimes, participants don't notice that this is happening. Also, ask people how they feel and engage them in why they feel that way. It is alright to pause and to debrief where the 'debate' came from.
- Remind participants of the Ground Rules that were established earlier (see Sample Ground Rules for Dialogue).
- Encourage people to differentiate between the person who is expressing an opinion, and the opinion that they are expressing. Help them put that energy and passion into the material, and not as combat against each other. Also, assist them in understanding why that is important.

Tips/Skills for Facilitating Dialogue:

This document is a short list of notions to keep in mind when facilitating. By focusing on these and trying to successfully act in these ways, the expectation is that participants will feel more comfortable and willing to participate fully. By creating that atmosphere, conversation will reach a new depth and people will take more from the opportunity. Some of these tips/skills are more difficult to do than others, and some take lots of practice to perfect.

Sample Ground Rules for Dialogue:

It is always a good idea to start by establishing ground rules. If time allows, you might want to ask participants to make a list of rules as a group. Whether they make the list or you simply supply it, here are some suggestions of rules that consistently work well. What is the value of establishing ground rules? Often, individuals enter a dialogue not feeling completely safe or comfortable participating. Maybe, they're nervous about being judged, or about having what they share repeated throughout the residence hall. Ground rules like these are meant to help participants feel more comfortable, and also to be very clear about the ethical expectations of being a part of the conversation.

There are two different types of ground rules in this packet. The document "Multicultural Ground Rules For Dialogue" is effective when you are talking about diversity and or multicultural topics and issues. The second document "Ground Rule For Dialogue" is a general set of expectations when having a dialogue or conversation in a group.

Other Suggestions:

- In addition to starting with Ground Rules, it's also beneficial to include an icebreaker in the beginning. This is especially, but not only, important when people don't know each other. Icebreakers are also useful for starting conversation and getting participants comfortable talking.
- Pose lots of questions. When you do, you may feel like no one is going to respond. It is important to recognize that what may feel like a long time to wait for you, feels less short for everyone else. Be patient. People, in general, don't like silence. If you wait, they will most likely say something.

Debate

Assuming that there is one right answer and that you have it

Combative: participants attempt to prove the other side wrong

About winning

Listening to find flaws and make counterarguments

Defending assumptions as truth

Critiquing the other side's position

Defending one's own views against those of others

Searching for flaws and weaknesses in other positions

Seeking a conclusion or vote that ratifies your position

Dialogue

Assuming that many people have pieces of the answer and that only together can they craft a solution

Collaborative: participants work together toward common understanding

About learning

Listening to understand and find meaning

Revealing assumptions for reevaluation

Reexamining all positions

Admitting that others' thinking can improve one's own

Searching for strengths and value in others' positions

Discovering new opinions, not seeking closure

Adapted from "What makes dialogue unique" in *The Magic of Dialogue* by Daniel Yankelovich, pp. 39-40 and provided by The Program on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan.

Differentiating Dialogue From Discussion: A Working Model (Kardin and Sevig, 1997)

Discussions are often conducted with the assumption of an equal “playing field,” with little or no acknowledgement of status and power differences in the room.

Individuals may engage in a **discussion** without an awareness or understanding of how the content of the discussion is related to the personal experiences of those in the room.

In **discussion**, emotional responses may be present but are seldom named and may be unwelcome.

Discussion tends to contribute to the formation of theoretical community—what society in general needs to understand to exist as a collective.

Discussion is often aimed toward the identification and expression of generalities, frameworks, and collective truths.

Discussions are often conducted with the primary goal of increasing clarity and understanding of the issue with the assumption that we are working with a stable reality.

The goal of individual contributions to **discussion** is to say the “right” (intelligent, polished, etc.) thing.

In **dialogue**, these differences are key elements in both the process and the content of the exchange.

In **dialogue**, personal experience is one of the key avenues through which participants deepen their understanding of conceptual and political issues.

In **dialogue**, emotional responses are honored and highlighted as important information that can be used to deepen our understanding of personal issues, group dynamics, our content, and the implications of our exchange.

Dialogue works to form active and immediate community among the specific individuals in the room.

Dialogue works to uncover specificity, contradictions, paradox, and a deeper understanding of and respect for one’s own personal reality and reality as it is experienced by others.

Dialogue may promote understanding and clarity but is often aimed at disruption, disequilibrium, confusion, and the destabilization of personal and collective realities.

In **dialogue**, our mistakes, biases, and shortsightedness can sometimes be the most important thing we have to offer to the process of bringing about personal and social change.

Facilitation Tips

1. Encourage trust and respect among participants. Be aware that everyone has the right to a voice and to be treated with respect. Also, encourage openness and honesty. Some ways of doing this are being supportive of members, acknowledging contributions of members, and respecting each member's way of "being" in the group.
2. Recognize the limits of your role. You are not responsible for everything that takes place in your group.
3. Have a sense of how you define your role.
4. It is helpful to "set the stage", going over ground rules, going over goals, going over expectations.
5. Encourage group members to listen to each other.
6. Try to be observant of what is happening in the group and for each individual group member. This may be hard. Try to key into what is being said, what is not being said, who is saying certain things, silences, underlying reasons for certain statements, etc. Be aware of what is going on between, and within, the total group.
7. Feelings may happen in this process and you will have to deal with them. It is important for you to clarify the role of feelings in the learning process. Feelings can be an important source of information for people and a avenue of learning.
8. Find a reasonable balance of challenge and support. Be willing to push, so that risks can be taken. Also, support people in this process, as this can be scary for some people.
9. Be aware of the tensions people experience between "individual needs" and "group needs." It is helpful to acknowledge that both are present and look for similarities/differences, etc. Key into the impact this has on the total group process.

Dialogue Facilitator Skills

I. Communication Skills

- a. being brief and concise
- b. being assertive
- c. drawing others out
- d. listening alertly

II. Observation Skills

- a. noting tension in groups
- b. noting who talks to whom
- c. noting interest level in group
- d. sensing feelings of individuals
- e. noting who is being "left out"
- f. noting reactions to your comments
- g. noting when a group avoids a topic
- h. noting covert and overt messages
- i. recognizing energy shifts and ebbs
- j. noticing sub-groupings, alliances
- k. noticing differences between groups in communication and conflict patterns

III. Emotional Expressiveness

- a. staying aware of own emotions
- b. expressing warm feelings
- c. expressing gratitude
- d. recognizing different cultural expressions of feelings

IV. Morale-Building Skills

- a. showing interest
- b. working to keep people from being ignored
- c. harmonizing, helping people reach agreement
- d. upholding rights of individuals in the face of group pressure
- e. expressing praise or appreciation
- f. unpacking conflict constructively

V. Ability to Face and Accept Emotional Situations

- a. being able to face conflict, anger
- b. being able to face closeness, affection
- c. being able to face disappointment
- d. being able to stand silence

VI. Group Logistics

- a. clarifying goals of session
- b. clarifying groundrules for discussion
- c. setting norms
- d. keeping time; reminding about time limits
- e. making transitions to different activities
- f. keeping group on task

VII. Interventions

- a. reminding group of ground rules
- b. asking for more participation
- c. equalizing participation
- d. asking for people to take turns speaking, if appropriate
- e. making space for quiet members
- f. interrupting/confronting nonproductive behaviors
- g. encouraging productive behaviors
- h. asking group to say the unspoken
- i. re-focusing group to stay on topic
- j. offering compassionate acknowledgment of emotions
- k. drawing on personal experiences to move group along
- l. commenting on process
- m. facilitating discussion about process
- n. pointing out avoidance behaviors
- o. making connections between group process and issues being discussed
- p. normalizing tension and conflict
- q. clarifying issues of conflicts and differences
- r. asking for clarification of unclear issues
- s. addressing misinformation and stereotypes
- t. defusing name-calling and hostilities

VIII: General

- a. demonstrating commitment to process
- b. demonstrating involvement
- c. sticking with uncomfortable situations

Training in Intergroup Conflict and Communication/September 19, 1993

Pam Motoike and Ratnesh Nagda

Multicultural Ground Rules For Dialogue

1. Our primary commitment is to learn from each other. We acknowledge differences amongst us in backgrounds, skills, interests, values, scholarly orientations and experience.
2. We acknowledge that sexism, classism, racism, heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination (based on religion, age, ability, language, education, size, geographic location etc.) exist and may surface from time to time.
3. We acknowledge that one of the meanings of discrimination is that we have been systematically taught misinformation about our own group and members of devalued groups (this is true for both dominant and dominated group members). The same is true about elitism and other forms of prejudice or bias - we are taught misinformation about others and ourselves.
4. We will try not to blame people for the misinformation we have learned, but we hold each other responsible for repeating misinformation or offensive behavior after we have learned otherwise.
5. We will try not to blame people for oppression they have experienced.
6. We will trust that people are always doing the best they can.
7. We will share information about our groups with other members of the class, and will not demean, devalue, or "put down" people for their- experiences or lack of experiences.
8. We will actively pursue opportunities to learn about our own groups and those of other groups, yet not enter or invade others' privacy when unwanted.
9. We each have an obligation to actively combat the myths and stereotypes about our own groups and other groups so that we can break down the walls that prohibit individual development, group progress and cooperation and group gain.
10. We want to create a safe atmosphere for open discussion. Members may wish to make a comment; therefore, the instructor and participants will agree not to repeat the remarks outside the session that links a person with his/her identity.
11. Challenge the idea or the practice and not the person
12. Speak your discomfort.

Groundrules For Dialogue

- 1. Confidentiality.** We want to create an atmosphere for open, honest exchange.
- 2. Our primary commitment is to learn from each other.** We will listen to each other and not talk at each other. We acknowledge differences amongst us in backgrounds, skills, interests, and values. We realize that it is these very differences that will increase our awareness and understanding through this process.
- 3. We will not demean, devalue, or “put down” people** for their experiences, lack of experiences, or difference in interpretation of those experiences.
- 4. We will trust that people are always doing the best they can.**
- 5. Challenge the idea and not the person.** If we wish to challenge something that has been said, we will challenge the idea or the practice referred to, not the individual sharing this idea or practice.
- 6. Speak your discomfort.** If something is bothering you, please share this with the group. Often our emotional reactions to this process offer the most valuable learning opportunities.
- 7. Step Up, Step Back.** Be mindful of taking up much more space than others. On the same note, empower yourself to speak up when others are dominating the conversation.
- 8. Maintain a safe atmosphere.**

CONTRIBUTIONS TO STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Guidelines: Departmental Contributions to Student Organization Activities

Many departments at the University value the opportunity to provide support for student organization initiated events and activities. Some of these organizations are *Sponsored Student Organizations* (SSOs), though many are *Volunteer Student Organization* (VSO) which have more limited, but clear benefits of a *Recognized Student Organization* (RSO) which may include access to U-M funding sources, student organization account, staff support, meeting space and/ or permanent office space. (For more information about student organization registration and recognition, please consult the following website: www.studentorgs.umich.edu .)

When considering student organization proposals for funding, or other in-kind support the Office of Student Activities and Leadership recommends that your unit/ division/ school/ college develop a protocol that incorporates the following guidelines and best practices:

- 1) Be aware of the organization's recognition status (see www.umich.edu/~maizepgs)
- 2) Have a process for reviewing support requests (financial, services or other in-kind support) that that reflects your unique contribution to the University mission, values and particular objectives in an objective and consistent manner. Applications are useful for standardizing this process.
- 3) Confirm through written documentation your expectation and agreements. (See SOAR Event Sponsorship Proposal as an example: www.studentorgs.umich.edu)

It is important here to clarify the distinction between "sponsoring" a student event/ program/ activity, or merely providing a limited contribution.* A reasonable expectation is to require a follow up report that provides details of the actual activity and an evaluation/ assessment of the successes/ challenges of the activity.
- 4) When considering a proposal that addresses election related activities, please review "Election Law Overview for Student Organizations" on the Student Organization website: www.studentorgs.umich.edu . Generally the university *cannot* sponsor or contribute to these types of activities.

*Sponsorship implies a partnership and endorsement of the program's goals, objectives and content; Contributions should be accompanied by a written disclaimer "this contribution should in no way be interpreted or represented as an endorsement of a particular viewpoint."

ELECTION LAW AND STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Election Law Overview for Student Organizations

I. Laws Affecting Election-Related Activities

Both Michigan and federal law regulate the ways in which public institutions –can participate in election-related activities. These laws limit what individuals or groups acting on behalf of the institution can do and how public resources can be used to influence the outcome of a political campaign or election.

A. Michigan Law

Section 57 of the Michigan Campaign Finance Act prohibits public bodies and anyone acting for a public body from using public resources to influence the outcome of candidate elections or ballot proposals. Under this Act, the University of Michigan cannot use public resources:

- To support or oppose a political candidate or
- To seek the qualification, defeat, or passage of a ballot proposal.

Michigan law defines “public resources” broadly to include, for example, funds, facilities, computer hardware and software, postage, and personnel. The Act applies to candidate elections and ballot proposals at all levels of government (federal, state, and local).

Detailed information about the Michigan Campaign Finance Act and the University of Michigan’s guidelines for compliance with that Act are available at:
<http://www.vpcomm.umich.edu/guidelines/>.

B. Federal Law

The federal Internal Revenue Code and regulations limit the political activities of 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations, such as the University of Michigan and the Michigan Student Assembly (MSA). Under these regulations, tax-exempt organizations are:

- Prohibited from participating in all campaign activity (at the federal, state, or local level) in support of or in opposition to political candidates; and
- Strictly limited in the amount of funding that they can use for lobbying activities. **Lobbying** is defined as attempting to influence legislation by contacting, or urging others to contact, members or employees of legislative bodies for the purpose of proposing, supporting, or opposing legislation, or advocating for the adoption or rejection of legislation.

Detailed information about the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) guidelines regarding political campaign intervention by charities, churches and educational institutions is available at:
<http://www.irs.gov/charities/charitable/article/0,,id=155030,00.html>.

II. Implications for Recognized Student Organizations

Although these federal and state laws may not seem to be directly relevant to student organizations, they do have important implications for recognized student groups. For example, these laws do apply directly to Sponsored Student Organizations (SSOs) because SSOs operate as units of the University of Michigan. In addition, neither the University nor MSA can fund a student organization activity that the University or MSA could not undertake on its own. Thus, neither the University nor MSA will grant Voluntary Student Organizations (VSOs) funding to conduct an activity that the University or MSA could not themselves do under Michigan or federal law.

The FAQs on the following pages will help explain more fully how these laws affect SSOs and VSOs.

SSO FAQ

What election-related activities are off-limits to SSOs?

In general, SSOs cannot engage in election-related activities that the University would be prevented from undertaking under state or federal law. Accordingly, when an SSO acts in its capacity as a unit of the University of Michigan or is using University funds or resources, it cannot engage in election-related activities such as the following:

- Donate money to support or oppose a ballot initiative, proposed legislation, or political candidate;
- Volunteer for campaigns by writing letters, making phone calls, knocking on doors, or distributing flyers in support of or opposition to a candidate, proposed legislation, or ballot proposal;
- Organize rallies in support of or opposition to a political candidate, proposed legislation, or ballot proposal;
- Write letters to the editor or op-ed pieces in support of or in opposition to a political candidate, proposed legislation, or ballot initiative; or
- Write, or encourage others to write, to elected officials to express opinions in support of or against a candidate, proposed legislation, or ballot initiative; or
- Host a fundraising event in which the proceeds are used to support or oppose a ballot initiative, proposed legislation, or political candidate.

What are considered to be University funds or resources?

University funds include any money from any University source (including MSA). University resources include property owned by or managed by the University, as well as services provided by University faculty or staff. As a result, SSOs are strictly prohibited from using the University's name (e.g., U-M, Michigan, Wolverines, Go Blue, or other protected forms), the University's logos (e.g., the Block M), University e-mail accounts, copying machines, mailing lists, stationery, telephones, or computers for campaign-related activities or lobbying efforts.

What election-related activities are permissible for SSOs?

SSOs may engage in activities that relate to political issues if those activities are educational and non-partisan in nature. These educational activities must present "a sufficiently full and fair exposition of the pertinent facts." Examples of permissible educational activities include:

- Voter registration drives (if conducted in a non-partisan manner);

- Candidate debates and forums as long as certain procedures are in place to ensure a fair and neutral forum for all qualified candidates; and
- Distribution of non-partisan voter guides or other factual information if certain guidelines are followed.

What are the penalties for violating the laws about participating in a political campaign?

It is a misdemeanor to knowingly violate Section 57 of Michigan's Campaign Finance Act. The law is enforced by the Michigan Secretary of State. Individuals who knowingly violate this law are subject to a fine of up to \$1,000 or imprisonment of up to one year or both. Also, if the Secretary of State determines that the University has knowingly violated the law, the University could be fined \$20,000 or an amount equal to the value of the resources used, whichever is greater.

In addition, if a charitable organization engages in lobbying in excess of the federal limits or in prohibited campaign activity, the organization may lose its tax-exempt status, resulting in all of its income being subject to taxation. In addition, the organization may be required to pay excise taxes with respect to the prior improper political activities. Furthermore, in some cases, an additional tax equal to 5% of the improper lobbying expenditures may be imposed against organization officers who knew of the expenditures' likely unlawfulness but approved them anyway.

Does state or federal law limit my ability to engage in political activity as an individual (rather than as an SSO)?

No, the law does not in any way restrict the ability of individuals, acting on their own behalf and using their personal time and resources, to participate fully in political activities. When you are engaging in political activities as a private individual, you must not say or imply that you are acting on behalf of the University or your SSO and must not use University/SSO resources to undertake your personal political activities.

Whom should an SSO consult to determine if a planned SSO activity is permissible?

SSOs should first speak with their sponsor to determine if the activity is consistent with the sponsor's mission. The sponsor may direct additional questions to either the Student Activities and Leadership Office or the Office of the Vice President and General Counsel.

VSO FAQ

Are there limits on the types of election-related activities that VSOs may undertake?

Yes, *if* University funds or resources are involved. VSOs (like SSOs) may not use University funds or resources to engage in:

- Lobbying activities;
- Campaign activities (including fundraising) for or against particular candidates; or
- Campaign activities (including fundraising) for or against ballot initiatives.

What are considered to be University funds or resources?

University funds include any money from any University source (including MSA). University resources include property owned by or managed by the University, as well as services provided by University faculty or staff. As a result, VSOs are strictly prohibited from using the University's name (e.g., U-M, Michigan, Wolverines, Go Blue, or other protected forms), the University's logos (e.g., the Block M), University e-mail accounts, copying machines, mailing lists, stationery, telephones, or computers for campaign-related activities or lobbying efforts.

What type of campaign-related activities can a VSO undertake using University funds and resources?

VSOs may access University funds or resources to engage in educational activities that relate to political issues. These educational activities must present "a sufficiently full and fair exposition of the pertinent facts." Examples of permissible educational activities include:

- Voter registration drives (if the VSO itself has tax-exempt status and conducts the drive in a non-partisan fashion);
- Candidate debates and forums as long as certain procedures are in place to ensure a fair and neutral forum for all qualified candidates; and
- Distribution of non-partisan voter guides or other factual information if certain guidelines are followed.

What type of election-related activities can a VSO undertake if University funds and resources are not involved?

A VSO has greater leeway to undertake political or campaign-related activities when it conducts those activities without using University funds or resources. Examples of activities that a VSO may undertake with its *own* funds and resources include:

- Invite speakers to campus to discuss ballot initiatives or other election-related issues;

- Donate money to a ballot initiative or candidate campaign;
- Act as a campaign volunteer by writing letters, making phone calls, knocking on doors or distributing flyers in support of or in opposition to a political candidate or ballot proposal;
- Organize rallies in support of or in opposition to a political candidate or ballot proposal;
- Write letters to the editor or op-ed pieces for publication;
- Give speeches and participate in debates; and
- Write to elected officials to express your opinions.

When a VSO engages in these types of campaign-related activities or lobbying efforts (which cannot involve the use of University funds or resources), the VSO must include a disclaimer on all related materials (print, online, etc.) that its activities do not represent the views of the University of Michigan. We recommend the following disclaimer:

This activity is not sponsored or endorsed in any way by the University of Michigan. The [student organization] is fully and solely responsible for this activity and the views expressed herein.

To what extent may a VSO reference its affiliation with the University in conducting its permissible campaign-related or lobbying activities?

All student organizations must comply with the University's Identity Guidelines, which outline the permissible use of the University of Michigan name, seal, and logos. The policy is available at <http://www.logos.umich.edu/guidelines>. The relevant portion is provided here:

While general usage of the University's name is discouraged, MSA-registered student organizations may use the name to signify the location of their activity. For example: "Chess Club at the University of Michigan" or "Association of Women in Science, U-M Chapter" are acceptable uses. Generally speaking, the University's name ("The University of Michigan," "U-M," or any derivative) may not be used in the beginning of any student organization name. Use of the seal in connection with any student organization is not allowed.

When considering if or how the University's name or logos can be used in connection with a student organization's name, the organization should contact the U-M Office of Student Activities and Leadership at 734-763-5900, since specific determinations are handled on a case-by-case basis. Non-registered and non-University organizations and entities are prohibited from any name association with the University.

All permissible election-related or lobbying activity organized by a VSO must include a disclaimer (such as the one provided above) informing the public that the activity is not sponsored or endorsed by the University of Michigan.

Can MSA engage in lobbying activities?

Yes, subject to the limits set by federal law. Because MSA maintains its own separate tax-exempt status, it may engage in permissible lobbying activities with regard to issues of concern to the entire student body.

If MSA can engage in lobbying activities, then why can't MSA fund VSO lobbying activities?

The IRS permits tax-exempt organizations to participate in lobbying activity only if that activity is "insubstantial." In addition, because MSA is associated with the University, a public institution, there are additional state law limits on the use of public funds and resources. These restrictions require significant administrative oversight for MSA to ensure its continued compliance with the law. As a result, MSA, in consultation with University advisors, has decided that it will not fund lobbying activities conducted by student organizations.

Can a VSO receive University funds to pay for travel to and from a lobbying activity?

No. University funds cannot be used to fund travel if the only purpose or the main purpose of the trip is to engage in lobbying activity. If, however, lobbying is only an incidental part of the activity, travel funds may be approved.

Can VSOs raise funds on University property to support election-related or lobbying activities?

Yes, provided that the fundraising activity (such as a bake sale or dance) satisfies the following two conditions. First, the VSO must comply with all relevant University policies, including those addressing use of University facilities. For example, political fundraising is prohibited in campus residence halls (see <http://www.housing.umich.edu/info/clam/index.php?list=1&article=A37.html>) and in any other University facility that is primarily used as a dwelling (such as the President's House).

Second, the VSO must include a disclaimer (such as the one provided above) informing the public that the activity is not sponsored or endorsed by the University of Michigan and, as discussed above, cannot use University resources to conduct the fundraiser.

Can VSOs publicize their election-related or lobbying activities on campus?

Yes, provided that they meet the following conditions. First, VSOs must use their own (i.e., non-University) funds to publicize their election-related or lobbying activities on campus. For a definition of *University funds*, go to:

<http://www.studentorgs.umich.edu/operations/funding.htm>

Second, any publicity must be consistent with University posting guidelines applicable to members of the general public or individual students. For example, VSOs may post flyers (that they produce using their own funds) in designated community spaces, distribute flyers in-person, or list events in the Daily or University Record.

Finally, all publicity must include a disclaimer (such as the one provided above) informing the public that the activity is not sponsored or endorsed by the University of Michigan.

What are the penalties for violating the laws about participating in a political campaign?

It is a misdemeanor to knowingly violate Section 57 of Michigan's Campaign Finance Act. The law is enforced by the Michigan Secretary of State. Individuals who knowingly violate this law are subject to a fine of up to \$1,000 or imprisonment of up to one year or both. Also, if the Secretary of State determines that the University has knowingly violated the law, the University could be fined \$20,000 or an amount equal to the value of the resources used, whichever is greater.

In addition, if a charitable organization engages in lobbying in excess of the federal limits or in prohibited campaign activity, the organization may lose its tax-exempt status, resulting in all of its income being subject to taxation. In addition, the organization may be required to pay excise taxes with respect to the prior improper political activities. Furthermore, in some cases, an additional tax equal to 5% of the improper lobbying expenditures may be imposed against organization officers who knew of the expenditures' likely unlawfulness but approved them anyway.

Does state or federal law limit my ability to engage in political activity as an individual (rather than as a VSO)?

No, the law does not in any way restrict the ability of individuals, acting on their own behalf and using their personal time and resources, to participate fully in political activities. When you are engaging in political activities as a private individual, you must not say or imply that you are acting on behalf of the University or your VSO and must not use University/VSO resources to undertake your personal political activities.

Whom should a VSO consult to determine if a planned VSO activity is permissible?

VSOs should contact the Student Activities and Leadership Office with any questions. The Student Activities and Leadership Office may in turn consult with the Office of the Vice President and General Counsel as needed.

A GUIDE TO WRITING LETTERS-TO-THE-EDITOR & OP-EDS

Letters to the Editor

Introduction

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: a briefly stated opinion generally written in response to a current issue or a previously published article.

Letters to the Editor are important because they:

- are typically the most frequently read part of the newspaper, other than the front page
- are often monitored by community and opinion leaders
- can convey a powerful message
- give you a chance to share information not addressed in an ordinary news article
- provide a way to ameliorate otherwise negative or harmful news coverage
- communicate to readers that there is widespread support for or against an issue
- are like having a turn in a panel discussion on an issue about which you care deeply, so use them to get your point across; this is not the venue in which one should objectively analyze all sides of the argument.

Structure, Tone, Style

- 150 – 300 words, depending on the publication (see below)
- Clear, concise & crisp text
- Classic letter style: opening paragraph; body of the argument; strong close
- Short sentences and small words
- Short paragraphs of 1 – 3 sentences, no more, otherwise risk losing most readers to whom longer text blocks in the standard newspaper column format look off-putting
- Conversational tone, not a lecture or “words from the mount”
- Keep it simple; no jargon, academic-speak, or slang, acronyms, profanity or libelous statements, nor an overabundance of numbers or data cites.
- Active, not passive verbs
- Limit the use of adjectives and adverbs.
- Avoid categoricals (always, never, best, worst); it’s easy to prove these wrong, and thereby undermine the writer’s credibility.
- Don’t get overheated because you cannot change people’s minds if they’re feeling defensive or angry.
- In the newspaper world, it’s okay to begin sentences with “And” and “But.”

Content

- If the publication receives multiple letters on the same topic, they'll choose one that says something in a new way or takes a unique angle.
- Address one point on one issue; clarity is essential.
- State your point early in the letter and support your point with facts.
- Link your interest to the publication you're writing to by making reference to the publication in the opening line, ie, "I was concerned to read about Congressman Smith's stance on the issue in your article of (title of article and its date)."
- If you are an authority on the topic, let it be known in the letter.
- *Elections and ballot initiatives:* As UofM faculty, staff, or students, you may not state explicitly or imply that you speak on behalf of the University. You may, however, speak fully and unreservedly as a private individual.

Process

- Be timely: If the topic is "hot," and generates several letters from readers, the first one in the door frequently is the one that gets published.
- Be informed on your topic.
- Read the publication to know what its stance is on your issue.
- If the publication tends to print opinions different from your own, it may choose to print your letter to help balance its opinion pages.
- Read your draft aloud to yourself.
- Have someone else read your draft, to be sure you got your point(s) across.
- Submitting your letter: Include the text and a **brief** cover note ****in the body of an email**** not as attachments. The cover note should include your name, address, and daytime phone and a one- to two-sentence biosketch that states your qualifications to address the topic, as appropriate.
- Be receptive to edits from the publication's editor.

Op-Eds

Introduction

OP-EDS are brief opinion articles published opposite the editorial page. They are longer and more influential than letters to the editor, and are therefore more difficult to get published.

Op-Eds are important because they:

- are typically, like letters, the most frequently read part of the newspaper, other than the front page
- are often monitored by community and opinion leaders
- can convey a powerful message
- give you a chance to share information not addressed in an ordinary news article
- provide a way to ameliorate otherwise negative or harmful news coverage
- are like having a turn in a panel discussion on an issue about which you care deeply, so use them to get your point across; this is not the venue in which one should objectively analyze all sides of the argument.

Structure, Tone, Style

- 500 – 800 words, depending on the publication (see below)
- Don't make your reader work to understand your message.
- Clear, concise, crisp text, fresh and striking concepts
- Short sentences and small words
- Conversational tone, not a lecture or “words from the mount”
- Don't get overheated because you cannot change people's minds if they're feeling defensive or angry.
- Avoid name-calling, repetition, clichés, or going off on tangents.
- State your point early; the first sentence should reveal exactly what you intend to write about.
- Begin with a “grabber” and then hit the ground running.
- Short paragraphs of 1 – 3 sentences, no more, otherwise risk losing most readers to whom longer text blocks in the standard newspaper column format look off-putting
- These are personal opinion pieces, so find your voice.
- Don't attack other groups/opinions; make your own point and support your point with facts.
- Don't make the other side's argument for them.
- Active, not passive verbs
- Limit use of adjectives and adverbs.
- Avoid categoricals (always, never, best, worst); it's easy to prove these wrong, and thereby undermine the writer's credibility.

- Keep it simple; no jargon, academic-speak, or slang, acronyms, profanity or libelous statements or an overabundance of numbers or data cites.
- Facts, statistics and examples tighten the argument and lend it color, but avoid drowning the reader in data.
- In the newspaper world, it's okay to begin sentences with "And" and "But."
- Suggested structure:
 - 1st graph: Grab readers with an engaging question, a personal anecdote, a concrete image, or a relevant example that sums up what you're saying. Then get directly to your thesis and state it clearly.
This must be well-stated and concise.
 - Once you've made your point, back it up with facts, figures, and examples. Make it timely and accurate. Move from a specific problem to a broader public view.
 - the final, powerful graph: a short conclusion that sums up your points
- Be receptive to edits from the publication's editor: they are more common than not.

Content

- Give them a story, ie, colorful examples, anecdotes that move your thesis forward—especially if they're brief and clearly to the point.
- Take a stand on the issue—this is not an objective academic analysis.
- Timing is key; if you can, submit your op-ed when the issue is hot, or when there's a news hook—a recent article, or an event, anniversary, holiday that ties in with the issue.
- The more unique and fresh your facts, the more likely you are to be published.
- Address one point on one issue; stick to that one compelling thesis, carry it throughout the op-ed piece, and prove it with facts.
- Include a one-sentence bio of yourself at the end of the article that communicates your expertise on the topic. If you include your UofM title (ie, professor, staff, etc), include a disclaimer that the title is provided for identification purposes.
- *Elections and ballot initiatives:* As UofM faculty, staff, or students, you may not state explicitly or imply that you speak on behalf of the University. You may, however, speak fully and unreservedly as a private individual.

Process

- Be informed on your topic.
- Be sure you can document any facts you cite.
- Read the publication to know what their stance is on your issue.
- If the publication tends to print opinions different from your own, they may choose to print your letter to help balance their opinion pages.
- Read your draft aloud to yourself.
- Have someone else read your draft, to be sure you got your point(s) across.

- Consider drafting the main points of your op-ed before a news break on your issue. Then, when your issue comes up in the news, just add the news hook in the first graph, and it's ready to be submitted while the topic's still hot (1 – 3 days behind a hot news story, for instance).
- Be receptive to edits from the publication's editor: they are more common than not.
- Submitting your op-ed: Include the text and a **brief** cover note ****in the body of an email**** not as attachments. The cover note should include your name, address, and daytime phone and a one- to two-sentence biosketch that states your qualifications to address the topic, as appropriate.
- Newspaper editors get a lot of mail, so follow-up the next day by phone to confirm receipt and politely bring your piece to the editor's attention.
- **If** and when s/he publishes you, thank the editor; good relationships with editorial staff could become a most valuable resource in the future.

Possible Destinations for Your Op-eds and Letters to the Editor

Detroit Free Press [If you're aiming for placement in a Detroit paper, submit here first; wait 48 hours before submitting the same piece to another paper.]

Letters: letters@freepress.com; 150 words or less

Op-eds: Address to Barb Arrigo at arrigo@freepress.com

Detroit News [submit here second; wait 48 hours]

Letters: letters@detnews.com

Op-eds: Address to Richard Burr at rburr@detnews.com

Ann Arbor News [submit here for Ann Arbor-area distribution; or submit here third, if rejected by *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News*]

Letters: letters@annarbornews.com (no attachments); fewer than 250 words

“Other Voices” [op-eds]: Address to Mary Morgan, opinion editor; 994.6605;
mmorgan@annarbornews.com

Michigan Daily

Letters: editpage.editors@umich.edu [300 words]

“Viewpoints” [op-eds]: editpage.editors@umich.edu

Also remember outlying Ann Arbor-area newspapers (Jackson, Saline, Dexter, Chelsea, etc) and BLOGS

Deborah Greene/UofM Media Relations & Public Affairs 8.11.06

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