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## University newspaper shut down over April Fools' issue

Saturday, April 12, 2003 Posted: 11:27 AM EDT (1527 GMT)

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### DELAND, Florida (AP) -- Stetson University suspended publication of its student newspaper and fired the editorial staff because an April Fools' Day issue included profanity, racist jokes and a sex column advocating rape and domestic violence.

The Reporter, founded in 1887 and billed as the state's first college newspaper, was shut down Wednesday for the remainder of the school year.

Staff members said they were given 15 minutes to clear their belongings out of the office as the locks were being changed.

The Reporter traditionally pokes fun at the faculty, student groups and itself with an April Fools' edition renamed The Distorter. But school officials say the students went too far this year.

"There's not much in this year's Distorter that you can laugh about," said Michelle Espinosa, the dean of students. "We believe very strongly in students' need for autonomy. But the students do assume responsibility for their editorial decisions."

Inside the fake issue, the Howard Thurman lecture series -- designed to promote racial dialogue -- was satirized with an article about a racist Civil War enthusiast drinking beer at a podium. The weekly sex column was written in Ebonics. And phony advertisements included a spray that "Kills townies dead" and one featuring profanity in giant block letters, "Because we are allowed to print it," it said.

"We pushed some buttons that may not have needed to be pushed," said sex columnist August Brown.

Though no longer affiliated with the Florida Baptist Convention, Stetson is still considered a conservative school. Alcohol wasn't allowed on its DeLand and St. Petersburg campuses until 1995.

The newspaper had been under pressure from administrators to tone down the content of recent editions. After the April 1 edition, school officials said they were inundated with calls and e-mails from upset alumni, faculty and students.

Staffers said they were disappointed they were fired without warning and that even people who had no say in the paper's editorial content lost their jobs.

"We've learned a lot in the last week as students and journalists," said fired editor-in-chief Teresa Schwarz. "I think that's something they're overlooking."

Administrators and student leaders will work to start a new student newspaper in the fall, Espinosa said. Former staff members may reapply and will be considered for rehiring, she said.

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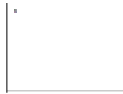
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