



November 25, 2020

Nancy Seideman
Communications and Public Affairs
Emory University
1762 Clifton Road, Plaza 1000
Atlanta, Georgia 30322

Sent via Electronic Mail (nancy.seideman@emory.edu)

Dear Vice President Seideman:

FIRE appreciates your attention to our letter of November 10, regarding our concerns about the state of freedom of the press at Emory University. We very much appreciate Emory's commitment to free expression, as discussed in your response, and as demonstrated by Emory's "green light" rated policies.

However, FIRE remains concerned that Emory's media policy may restrict the rights of student journalists in ways inconsistent with Emory's stated values.

Emory's "Media and Information Guidelines" require "news media" to seek permission from the Office of University Relations prior to engaging in newsgathering in campus facilities.¹ The policy further requires permission to be granted to film on any part of campus.²

Because this policy includes no exception for student journalists, it can be applied to restrict the newsgathering of student journalists.³ While we are certain that Emory doesn't intend to apply this policy to student journalists, the fact that it—based on its plain language—*could be* so applied risks a chilling effect that is untenable at a university that highly values free expression and transparency, as Emory does.

FIRE has unfortunately seen this chilling effect play out at other institutions. We have spoken with numerous student journalists at colleges and universities across the nation who come to

¹ *Media Information and Guidelines*, EMORY U., <https://news.emory.edu/press/media-information-and-guidelines.html> (last visited Nov. 20, 2020).

² *Id.*

³ As an organization dedicated to defending the rights of students and faculty on college campuses, FIRE takes no position regarding the application of such policies to professional journalists.

us with concerns about how their institutions' media policies might restrict their ability to gather news. While these policies are often not intended to apply to student reporters—as we believe is the case at Emory—the ambiguity and the fact that at least some institutions *do* actively apply such policies to the student press leaves student journalists reasonably concerned about the status of their rights.

While we can certainly understand that, as you shared in your letter, Emory's media policy “is not designed to restrict media on our campus, but to assist media in their access while ensuring the routine operation of the university,” we do hope Emory will take this opportunity to explore ways that it might better balance its commitments to free expression, transparency, streamlined media relations, and its normal operations. As offered in our letter of November 10, FIRE would be pleased to extend our support and assistance as Emory undergoes these policy revisions.

We request receipt of a response to this letter no later than the close of business on December 9, 2020.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lindsay Rank". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lindsay" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Rank".

Lindsay Rank

Program Officer, Individual Rights Defense Program