



October 27, 2025

Todd Lamb  
President's Office  
University of Central Oklahoma  
100 North University Drive  
Edmond, Oklahoma 73034

Sent via U.S. Mail and Electronic Mail ([tglamb@uco.edu](mailto:tglamb@uco.edu))

Dear President Lamb:

FIRE's Student Press Freedom Initiative<sup>1</sup> condemns the University of Central Oklahoma's continued efforts to control the content and distribution of *The Vista*, UCO's student newspaper.<sup>2</sup> As a public university bound by the First Amendment,<sup>3</sup> UCO simply may not meddle with the editorial choices of an editorially independent newspaper. UCO's actions impermissibly restrict the right to a free press the First Amendment guarantees all Americans. We therefore write to demand the university immediately cease its retaliation against *The Vista*, allow the newspaper to distribute its news and opinion in print or however else it chooses, and confirm that the student editors—not administrators—control the paper's content.

For 122 years, *The Vista* has been an editorially independent publication. *The Vista* began printing decades before UCO itself was created out of its predecessor institutions. Indeed, it was printed on paper before Oklahoma itself became a state. And—as the university itself has

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<sup>1</sup> For more than 25 years, FIRE has defended freedom of expression and other individual rights on America's university campuses. You can learn more about our mission and activities at [thefire.org](http://thefire.org). FIRE's Student Press Freedom Initiative (SPFI) defends free press on campus by advocating for the rights of student journalists at colleges and universities across the country.

<sup>2</sup> The recitation of facts here reflects our understanding of the pertinent information. We appreciate that you may have additional information to offer and invite you to share it with us.

<sup>3</sup> *Healy v. James*, 408 U.S. 169, 180 (1972) (“[T]he precedents of this Court leave no room for the view that, because of the acknowledged need for order, First Amendment protections should apply with less force on college campuses than in the community at large. Quite to the contrary, ‘the vigilant protection of constitutional freedoms is nowhere more vital than in the community of American schools.’”) (internal citation omitted).

recognized—*The Vista* has won numerous awards for its coverage of UCO and the Edmond community.<sup>4</sup>

As the Reporters’ Committee for Freedom of the Press laid out in its October 7, 2025, letter to you and other administrators, beginning in 2024, UCO has engaged in a campaign designed to suppress negative content in *The Vista*.<sup>5</sup> You told then-student Jake Ramsey that the newspaper was reporting on “broken eggs” instead of the “perfectly good omelette” you preferred *Vista* writers cover.<sup>6</sup> Ramsey understood this to be a request that he and other journalists provide fawning coverage of the university rather than report objectively on campus affairs.<sup>7</sup> Then, after the Student Media Advisory Board approved print funding for *The Vista*, the university stepped in, barring the paper from using private funds to print.<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Maier, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, ultimately told SMAB chair Joe Hight that the university would allow the paper to use private funds after all, but only for a “promotional magazine” that UCO “could distribute to prospective students and donors.”<sup>9</sup> And, to ensure the paper abided by the print ban, the university absconded with *The Vista*’s distribution racks, removing them from their locations on campus.<sup>10</sup>

When students sought to report on the university’s interference, *Vista* advisor Erika Williams and administrator Amber Loomis discouraged journalists from covering it, suggesting that doing so could be “dangerous.”<sup>11</sup> This semester, Williams and Loomis made clear just how dangerous that reporting would be by demoting, firing, and refusing to hire staff members who spoke out against the print ban.<sup>12</sup>

To uphold its First Amendment obligations, UCO may not impose restrictions based on what student media publish.<sup>13</sup> This includes any effort to gag the publication of content the

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<sup>4</sup> Hannah Wagar, *UCO Students, The Vista Win Awards in Statewide Newspaper Contest*, UCO NEWS (July 1, 2025) <https://news.uco.edu/uco-students-the-vista-win-awards-in-statewide-newspaper-contest> [<https://perma.cc/S5TF-33JR>].

<sup>5</sup> See generally Letter from Leslie K. Briggs, attorney, to Todd Lamb, President (Oct. 22, 2025) <https://www.rcfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/2025-10-07-RCFP-letter-to-University-of-Central-Oklahoma.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 4.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., *Stanley v. Magrath*, 719 F.2d 279, 282 (8th Cir. 1983) (“[a] public university may not constitutionally take adverse action against a student newspaper . . . because it disapproves of the content of the paper”); *Schiff v. Williams*, 519 F.2d 257, 260–61 (5th Cir. 1975) (holding that dismissing editors due to alleged inaccuracies in a student newspaper violates the First Amendment); *Joyner v. Whiting*, 477 F.2d 456, 462 (4th Cir. 1973) (“[i]t may well be that a college need not establish a campus newspaper . . . . But if a college has a student newspaper, its publication cannot be suppressed because college officials dislike editorial comment”); *Antonelli v. Hammond*, 308 F. Supp. 1329, 1337 (D. Mass. 1970) (holding that freezing a university newspaper’s funding because administrators deemed its content “garbage” was a violation of student journalists’ First Amendment rights); *Trujillo v. Love*, 322 F. Supp. 1266, 1271 (D. Colo. 1971) (holding that “[h]aving established a particular forum for expression, officials may not then place limitations upon the use of that forum which interfere with protected speech”).

university opposes. The Supreme Court has called such prior restraints “the most serious and least tolerable infringement on First Amendment rights.”<sup>14</sup> These orders are particularly pernicious, as they immediately and irreversibly restrict the publication of information—a principle that is especially true when such restraints are applied to the news media.<sup>15</sup>

UCO’s outrageous decision to ban *The Vista* from publishing its news on paper is another prior restraint on expression, encroaching on editorial decisions that the First Amendment leaves in student editors’ hands.<sup>16</sup> Once a university recognizes a student publication, particularly when it and its predecessors have done so for over a century, it may only regulate the content and mode of distribution of students’ expression when the publication’s content would lead to significant “violent disruption.”<sup>17</sup> UCO has asserted only that print costs too much for the university to fund; it has put forth no explanation for a ban on using private funds to print. The university would be hard-pressed to argue the mere existence of a print product—even one that has the gall to report real news instead of publishing puff pieces—would lead to violent disruption that might allow it to restrict the publication. The university, therefore, cannot order students to change any face of *The Vista*’s content, including how it chooses to publish the news.

Furthermore, UCO has engaged in unlawful viewpoint discrimination, an “egregious” form of censorship.<sup>18</sup> The “government must abstain from regulating speech when the specific motivating ideology or the opinion or perspective of the speaker is the rationale for the restriction.”<sup>19</sup> This prohibition on viewpoint discrimination extends to protect speakers from the retaliatory removal of government benefits, even those to which the speaker is not entitled.<sup>20</sup>

There is no doubt that the viewpoints *Vista* writers expressed led to the print ban. You made the university’s position clear when you suggested the paper stop reporting on “broken eggs.”<sup>21</sup> Dean Maier explicitly conditioned repealing the (unconstitutional) print ban on the paper changing the tone of its coverage. While the paper is certainly not entitled *a priori* to university funding, the university’s actions indicate the decision to slash that funding was based on the paper’s viewpoint.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, student editors were demoted, not hired, fired, or saw their responsibilities gutted right after they spoke out against these viewpoint-based cuts. Every adverse action the university took against *The Vista* and its editors was either explicitly a response to the paper’s coverage or issued in response to staffers’ expressed viewpoints. This

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<sup>14</sup> *Neb. Press Ass’n v. Stuart*, 427 U.S. 539, 559 (1976).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *Bazaar v. Fortune*, 476 F.2d 570, 574–80 (5th Cir. 1973).

<sup>18</sup> *Rosenberger v. Rector & Visitors of Univ. of Va.*, 515 U.S. 819, 829 (1995).

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Perry v. Sindermann*, 408 U.S. 593, 597 (1972).

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Briggs, *supra* note 5 at 2.

<sup>22</sup> This is particularly true considering the advisory board budget fully funded the print operation. Letter from Briggs, *supra* note 5 at 5.

makes UCO's print ban, funding cut, and punitive measures against individual staffers constitutionally impermissible.<sup>23</sup>

Taken together, UCO's actions represent a campaign to inhibit the press. Even though UCO's students have proven themselves particularly determined and resistant to the university's censorship efforts, the university's brazen incursions on their First Amendment rights nevertheless have a chilling effect on them and would most certainly chill a "person of ordinary firmness" from exercising their expressive right.<sup>24</sup> This makes the university's actions a sanctionable First Amendment violation.<sup>25</sup>

Because of the severity of this continuing violation, we request a substantive response to this letter no later than November 10, 2025, confirming the university will rescind the print ban, stop meddling with *The Vista's* content, and end its retaliatory crusade against the paper and its staff.



Dominic Coletti  
Program Officer, Campus Rights Advocacy

Cc: Elizabeth Maier, College of Arts and Sciences Dean  
Michael Breslin, Department of Mass Communication Chair  
Erika Williams, *The Vista* Faculty Advisor

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<sup>23</sup> See *Rosenberger*, 515 U.S. at 829; *Dye v. Office of the Racing Comm'r*, 702 F.3d 286, 303–304 (6th Cir. 2012) (holding even demotion and modification of working conditions that would “chill ... a person of ordinary firmness” from speaking were adverse actions).

<sup>24</sup> *Mendocino Env't Ctr. V. Mendocino Cnty.*, 192 F.3d 1283, 1300 (9th Cir. 1999).

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*