



October 20, 2025

Ms. Leslie K. Briggs
Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press
P.O. Box 471094
Tulsa, OK 74147

RE: University of Central Oklahoma
The Vista

Dear Ms. Briggs:

The University of Central Oklahoma (“UCO”) vehemently denies the meritless claims raised in your October 7, 2025, correspondence regarding UCO’s independent student news outlet, The Vista. UCO continues its unwavering support of The Vista, its editorial independence, and the student reporters offering their time and energy to inform and entertain the UCO campus community – especially as it moves into a format that is more relatable to students in a digital age.

First and foremost, the University’s decision to distribute The Vista in a digital format instead of a paper format had nothing to do with The Vista’s content. UCO has historically and continues to support the editorial independence of The Vista. Despite your self-serving mischaracterization of comments by President Lamb and others, UCO has made no efforts either directly or indirectly, to undermine the independence of The Vista or otherwise censor its content. The Vista is hosted on a platform that is not controlled by UCO, thus, UCO cannot affect any Vista content via its digital location. I encourage you to read The Vista and find for yourself that UCO is not exercising any editorial restriction or control over The Vista or the stories contributed by UCO students. You will also find that in its new digital format, The Vista is much more accessible to readers like yourself who live outside of Edmond and do not have the opportunity to visit the campus weekly to get the latest edition of The Vista.

UCO has taken no action against Vista staffers in retaliation for them exercising their rights under the First Amendment. As of the date of this letter, I have received no information from you in response to my letter dated October 8, 2025, in which I requested specific information to support your claims of retaliation. Put simply, I can only assume that you have refused to supply such information because none exists.

Your characterization of instances you describe as retaliatory in your letter is simply incorrect. For example, George Lang, the UCO faculty member who served as faculty advisor to The Vista from approximately October, 2021, to August, 2024, was not dismissed by the University. Rather, he voluntarily resigned from UCO to accept a position at a university in Florida. In addition, students have not been punished for voicing a position in favor of retaining the print format. Rather, Mr.

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Lopez voluntarily resigned his role as editor-in-chief to serve as a resident assistant, Mr. Shackelford resigned after advising the Vista faculty advisor that he had been offered another job that would interfere with his ability to be a reporter for The Vista, and Ms. Spurlock voluntarily resigned her managing editor position after being given additional responsibilities – not fewer responsibilities as your letter implies.

Your characterization of Dean Maier's exchange with Prof. Hight via a July 22, 2025, email also misrepresents the clear language of that communication and is patently false. Nothing in Dean Maier's exchange with Prof. Hight could be read with intellectual honesty as attempting to suppress or censor the content of The Vista in its new digital format. Clearly, Dean Maier's statement about the potential content of a theoretical "magazine-style publication" did not modify her specific instructions that "the Vista would be produced digitally, rather than in print, starting in Fall 2025 semester" or "The bottom line is the Vista will be digital starting in the fall." Your intentional mischaracterization of Dean Maier's clear instructions does not turn her comment about a theoretical publication into censorship of The Vista – which continues publication with editorial independence in digital format.

Contrary to your unsupported claims alleging censorship and retaliation, UCO's decision to distribute The Vista in a digital format instead of a paper format can be summarized by three reasons: (1) academic freedom and pedagogical reasons; (2) availability of resources; and (3) enhanced opportunities for distribution. First, in a world where print media is rapidly being replaced by digital media, UCO and its faculty see an opportunity to place a greater emphasis on growing technologies for its students – a decision squarely within the doctrine of academic freedom. Second, as stated above, the prior Vista faculty advisor resigned from UCO and moved to another state. As a result, UCO was faced with finding a replacement faculty advisor for The Vista. After seeking volunteers from available, qualified faculty, no one – not even Prof. Hight – stepped forward to assume the role. The only faculty member who expressed interest was the current Vista faculty advisor whose experience and expertise lies in digital communications. Third, an April 15-21, 2025, survey of pick-up rates for the printed Vista revealed a pick-up rate of only 12.9% across all campus locations – not the exaggerated figure created by Prof. Hight. With its Internet-based content, cross promotion and support of social media, and other digital platform opportunities, UCO believes that readership of the Vista can be enhanced significantly through a digital format.

In sum, your allegations of censorship, retaliation and restraints on free speech are completely without merit. It is clear that you are receiving false and/or incomplete information designed to further the personal interests of a very small minority. UCO stands by its decision to continue publication and distribution of The Vista in a digital format.

Sincerely,



Kendall Parrish
General Counsel