



# Delta State University

Office of the President

March 17, 2015

Dr. Robert Buckman  
President  
Southeast Journalism Conference  
P.O. Box 43650  
Lafayette, LA 70504-3650

Dear Professors Buckman, Lowary, and McNeil:

I am in receipt of your letter of March 9, 2015.

I am, indeed, very proud of our student newspaper, *The Delta Statement*, for its recent “Best in the South” award from your organization for the paper’s online website. I have written our student newspaper editor to congratulate her and the paper staff on this grand achievement, and I posted a tweet to the same effect, recognizing both our awards and winners. It should be noted that your organization’s award reaffirms for us what students told us in our program review process—they prefer to read their news online. That is a fact.

While I recognize your preference and rationale in coupling the journalism program (which is an academic enterprise) with the student newspaper (which is a student activity), we see it differently as we confront major budget issues. They are separate functions and activities. While the journalistic training a student receives certainly can, and often does, dovetail nicely with newspaper work, it is not necessary. Many student newspapers are run and staffed by non-journalism students. In fact, that was my personal experience as a student at Delta State. Many universities without journalism programs sport robust student newspapers. So, the opportunity to have that experience at Delta State going forward is not lost.

To help you with perspective, the review and elimination of the journalism program should not be a surprise to anyone who objectively reviews the context and facts surrounding the decision. The journalism program has been under formal review by our governing board, the Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL), since 2008. All programs undergo a mandatory review, per Board policy, when triggered by low graduation numbers. Delta State’s journalism program has been under such review for many years. In addition, a University Budget Committee was formed in 2009 to review programs with low enrollments. In the years since the review, journalism programs at other Mississippi institutions have grown tremendously; yet, enrollment in the journalism program at Delta State in the intervening years has continued to decline. Those happen to be the facts.

To help you understand the timing of decisions, elimination of the journalism program, as well as a reduction in the operations to facilitate the transfer of the newspaper to an online edition, was first discussed in a Cabinet retreat on July 24, 2014. Information regarding the journalism major, along with the other programs being reviewed, was sent to all deans, chairs, and faculty on September 12, 2014. The appropriate dean and chair received the information regarding the newspaper budget on September 12, 2014 as well. An open forum was held on September 30, 2014, where the process and details about program and non-program cuts (such as *The Delta Statement* reduction) were discussed. Students, faculty, and staff had ample opportunity to weigh-in with their perspectives throughout the process. There was barely a mention of concern. This timeline is factually based.

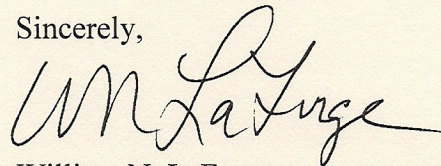
When the well-considered budget reduction and program elimination proposals came to our Cabinet for discussion and disposition, our student-elected SGA president, who sits on the Cabinet, supported the \$10,000 reduction in the newspaper budget, and embraced the notion of an online paper on behalf of the students he represents. The Cabinet vote on all points was unanimous. On a separate issue, the lawsuit you reference in your letter was filed October 20, 2014—well after the public announcement of the Cabinet's review of these programs for potential elimination or reduction—and, it has nothing to do with either the journalism program or the student newspaper. Those also happen to be the facts.

The ideas you raise—that the elimination of the journalism program or the reduction of the print budget for *The Delta Statement* might be the result of negative student newspaper stories about the administration, or might be due to an unrelated lawsuit—might lead some to engage in juicy conspiracy theories, “yellow journalism,” and specious rants about censorship and First Amendment rights. However, the facts validate a completely different story.

You will note that I mention “facts” often in my response to you. You have written a letter that is filled with innuendo and red herrings, and is based on unverified information from a single source (or perhaps from two students and one professor) that is, in large measure, misguided and inaccurate. Those premises, in my view, should not be the preferred approach and methodology of good journalists who should be held accountable for a factual work product. I subscribe to the old saw that you are entitled to your own opinions, but not your own facts.\* It appears that your conclusions are not fully grounded in facts.

It is unfortunate that our budget exigencies result in the need to cut or eliminate programs across campus that I would prefer to maintain. Nevertheless, as I have stated previously and publicly on our campus, I look forward to restoring all of the programs when student demand and university resources can support them.

Sincerely,



William N. LaForge  
President

cc: Mr. Aubrey Patterson, President, IHL Board  
Dr. Hank Bounds, IHL Commissioner  
Dr. Jim Borsig, IHL Commissioner-Designate  
Mr. Richard Myers, Past-President, Delta State University Alumni Association  
Mr. Rob Armour, President, Delta State University Alumni Association  
Dr. Charles McAdams, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost  
Dr. Dave Breaux, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences  
Mr. Don Allan Mitchell, Interim Chair, Division of Languages and Literature