



2017

2017 Constitution Day Essay Contest Honorable Mention--On Freedom of Expression

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Recommended Citation

Baehner, Emily, "2017 Constitution Day Essay Contest Honorable Mention--On Freedom of Expression" (2017). *Constitution Day Essay Contest*. 13.

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Constitution Day, created in 2004 by an act of Congress, mandates that all publicly funded schools provide educational programming on the history of the U.S. Constitution, which was adopted by delegates to the Constitutional Convention on Sept. 17, 1787. This year's Constitution Day at UK is Monday, September 18th (see <http://www.uky.edu/studentacademicsupport/constitution-day>). Under direction from the Office of the President and the Provost, the Office of Academic Excellence partnered with the College of Arts & Sciences to lead a cross-campus gathering of support for offering Constitution Day activities at the University of Kentucky. Staff and faculty work with many different student organizations and units on campus to develop a campus-wide approach to the celebration of our rights and responsibilities as citizens of the U.S. and to develop habits of citizenship in a new generation of Americans. The general thematic topic this year is focusing on "I Am Kentucky: The Commonwealth and Our Common Future."

An essay contest for undergraduates is sponsored by the UK Scripps Howard First Amendment Center, the Office of the President and the Provost's Office of Academic Excellence. The essays are blind-judged by former UK journalism students who are lawyers, UK professors and media law professors at other universities. The entries are scored on the following criteria: historical and legal accuracy of the content, the strength and logic of the argument, the original ideas presented, the organization of the argument, including the thesis, and the quality of the writing. The winners are announced the First Amendment Celebration, 6:00 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 28, in the Auditorium of the W.T. Young Library.

The essay, which cannot exceed 750 words, addressed this writing prompt:

Donald J. Trump is not the first U.S. president to confront the news media over its reporting on him, his policies, and his administration. (Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Grant, Truman, Nixon, and George W. Bush, among others, were subjected to often harsh press coverage). While the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees journalists the right to publish information without government interference -- except in special cases, particularly those involving national security -- it also ensures that the president and other government officials are free to criticize the news media.

Essays must address this question: When President Trump disparages the news media by talking about "fake news," "the failing @nytimes," the press as the "enemy of the American people," does he strengthen the First Amendment by engaging in a lively debate about an important subject, or does he weaken freedom of the press by attempting to persuade people that most journalists cannot be trusted?

Emily Baehner – Honorable Mention

On Freedom of Expression

Unflinching confidence. An inexplicable sense of self-assurance. That's the only way I can think to describe the feeling I have that I picked the right major. A feeling that began the moment I declared a journalism major last year, and it hasn't dissipated in the months since. Whether it be by the comforting ease that I feel when I write, or the pride that I have in knowing that in my future as a reporter I will have a responsibility to the citizens of this country, I am constantly reminded that this is what I am meant to do. When I entered the first journalism class I had after declaring my major, I was enveloped in the power of words, in the comfort of being in a room full of people who found the same excitement in pursuing a career that relied so heavily on unwavering responsibility, accountability, and honesty. And then Donald Trump was elected.

Uneasiness. A strict sense of nervousness. That's how I felt when President Trump began to negate the news media, disdainfully referring to the industry as "fake news". I didn't know what his election meant for my future as a journalist. I felt powerless, as the most powerful man in our country continually discredited professionals who I admired, and disrespected the field that I one day hoped to be a part of. His anti-media rhetoric alarmed me; I wanted to be a journalist because I respected what their work meant to the American people. Journalists stand for credibility and accuracy. I wanted my president to respect that. As the months following President Trump's inauguration, the national conversation on the truthfulness of journalists has turned increasingly negative. Fear is the emotion I feel about my major most often now.

Donald Trump's words are not just viewed as a voicing of opinion. For so many journalism professionals, it is seen as an attack on their livelihood, on their careers. For so many citizens, his claims about the press being "the enemy of the people" gives them a reason not to trust reporters and broadcasters. President Trump threatens the security of the freedom of the press, by suggesting that they are not the honest, hardworking watchdogs of American politics and society that I know them to be. Unfortunately for those in this industry, this is the reality. It is my reality.

America is built on values instilled in the fabric of the nation by the Constitution; within those rights guaranteed to the citizens of this country, freedom of the press is one that has been regarded as cornerstone in a journalist's ability to do their job. They require the ability to report on the news without fear of persecution. It's something that the forefathers fought for; to ensure to future generations that they would have someone to ensure that government remains open, that citizens are enlightened to the truth about their country. For President Trump to suggest that good journalists do anything besides that is a disservice to the men and women whose aim is to be a watchdog for the people.

Journalism is a people industry, a living, breathing manifestation of a reporter's work splashed across the front page of a newspaper. It is a culmination of the writer, an offering to the people that promises complete honesty, a candid account of what is going on in the country around them. To suggest that this

occupation is “fake” or that it is the “enemy of the people” is nothing but a disservice to the men and women who are good working journalists. It is because of those men and women that I have hope for my future in the industry. William Wordsworth encouraged writers “Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.” That is what journalists do. That is what I know that one day I will do. And for me, that experience will be anything but “fake”.

