

**THE MERCURY**

Olivares Gutierrez, Gregorio <editor@utdmercury.com>

Letter to the Editor: In response to the editor's disclaimer on the August 19 Letter to the Editor: Campus Antisemitism

8 messages

Roth, Helen <helen.roth@utdallas.edu>

Thu, Aug 22, 2024 at 7:45 AM

To: "editor@utdmercury.com" <editor@utdmercury.com>, "opinioneditor@utdmercury.com"

<opinioneditor@utdmercury.com>

Cc: "Lum, Lydia" <Lydia.Lum@utdallas.edu>, "Huffenberger, Jenni" <jennib@utdallas.edu>, "Roth, Helen"

<helen.roth@utdallas.edu>

Letter to the Editor

As a longtime member of the UTD community with experience as a professional news reporter, I was perplexed by the disclaimer on the August 19 Letter to the Editor: Campus Antisemitism. I found Mr. Steinberg's opinion piece regarding the October 7th vile massacre committed by Hamas terrorists, the aftermath, and its influence on campus life to be newsworthy and accurate. Could you please identify exactly what the editorial staff considers factual errors in his opinion piece? Also, in the spirit of full transparency, could you please publish The Mercury's journalistic standards?

The Student Media department has recently added professional staff. Perhaps we can look forward to enhanced journalistic standards, including prohibiting the editorial staff from censoring opinion pieces as a condition of publication, as happened before the acceptance of Mr. Steinberg's letter.

The UTD student body is not monolithic, and as student fees pay for The Mercury, our students deserve unbiased news and full transparency.

Sincerely,

Helen K. Roth

The University of Texas at Dallas

[800 W. Campbell Road](#)[Richardson, Texas 75080](#)<https://www.utdallas.edu/>

Lum, Lydia <Lydia.Lum@utdallas.edu>

Thu, Aug 22, 2024 at 10:13 AM

To: "Roth, Helen" <helen.roth@utdallas.edu>, "editor@utdmercury.com" <editor@utdmercury.com>,
"opinioneditor@utdmercury.com" <opinioneditor@utdmercury.com>

Cc: "Huffenberger, Jenni" <jennib@utdallas.edu>

Hi Helen,

Thank you for reaching out.

Although The Mercury is student-run, I am its adviser and for the sake of clarity, I'd like to ask:

1 – with top header "Letter to the Editor," do you intend for your submission to be potentially published in The Mercury? y/n?

2 – You asked a question beginning, "Could you please....etal" Is your intent to be solely a part of the "letter" submission, or are you asking the students or myself (or anyone else) for a dialog? I'm just trying to "hear" you correctly, that is all.


I appreciate your time very much.

Lydia Lum

Director of Student Media

[Division of Student Affairs, You Belong Here.](#)

(972) 883-6343 | Office SU 1.601A | Mailstop SU 24

 **THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS**

From: Roth, Helen <helen.roth@utdallas.edu>

Sent: Thursday, August 22, 2024 7:45 AM

To: editor@utdmercury.com <editor@utdmercury.com>; opinioneditor@utdmercury.com
<opinioneditor@utdmercury.com>

Cc: Lum, Lydia <Lydia.Lum@UTDallas.edu>; Huffenberger, Jenni <jennib@utdallas.edu>; Roth, Helen
<helen.roth@utdallas.edu>

Subject: Letter to the Editor: In response to the editor's disclaimer on the August 19 Letter to the Editor: Campus Antisemitism

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Racheeti, Kavya <opinioneditor@utdmercury.com>

Thu, Aug 22, 2024 at 10:18 AM

To: Gregorio Olivares Gutierrez <editor@utdmercury.com>

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--

Maria Shaikh

Opinion Editor, *The Mercury*

opinioneditor@utdmercury.com

Cell: 319-440-3382

Roth, Helen <helen.roth@utdallas.edu>

Thu, Aug 22, 2024 at 10:20 AM

To: "Lum, Lydia" <Lydia.Lum@utdallas.edu>, "editor@utdmercury.com" <editor@utdmercury.com>, "opinioneditor@utdmercury.com" <opinioneditor@utdmercury.com>
Cc: "Huffenberger, Jenni" <jennib@utdallas.edu>

Good morning,

Thank you for your prompt response and your questions. 1. I would like the letter to be published as written, and 2. I would appreciate answers to my questions to be published as well.

I'm happy to chat with you if you have any further questions. I appreciate the time and consideration of everyone involved.

Sincerely,

Helen

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Olivares Gutierrez, Gregorio <editor@utdmercury.com>

Thu, Aug 22, 2024 at 10:29 AM

To: "Roth, Helen" <helen.roth@utdallas.edu>

Hello Helen,

We are happy to respond to your questions. We are currently in the process of remaking our website which will include an FAQ of our policy since there are 100+ total pages of policy we abide by. Is there a particular point of interest you have regarding our journalistic standards you would like to see the policy for?

I am also unsure what you mean by "censoring opinions as a condition of publication," Jade Steinberg had their opinion published as they submitted it. While we do have an editing process, the edits we leave are suggestions left to the discretion of the author to implement or disregard as they choose.

Regards,



THE MERCURY | UTD MERCURY.COM

Gregorio Olivares Gutierrez

Editor-in-Chief

phone: +1 (214) 600-6245

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Roth, Helen <helen.roth@utdallas.edu>

Thu, Aug 22, 2024 at 10:43 AM

To: "Olivares Gutierrez, Gregorio" <editor@utdmercury.com>
Cc: "Lum, Lydia" <Lydia.Lum@utdallas.edu>, "Huffenberger, Jenni" <jennib@utdallas.edu>

Hello,

I'd like to see all the current journalistic standards that Mr. Steinberg's letter failed to meet as well as what factual errors you claim his submission contains.

As a former professional journalist, I have no issues with editing processes, but requiring Mr. Steinberg to make all the changes your team insisted upon before accepting it for publication is beyond editing.

Regards,

Helen

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Olivares Gutierrez, Gregorio <editor@utdmercury.com>

Thu, Aug 22, 2024 at 5:54 PM

To: "Roth, Helen" <helen.roth@utdallas.edu>

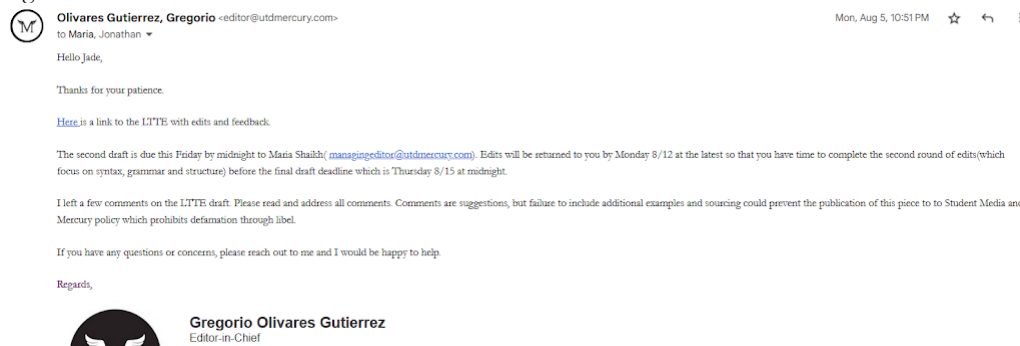
Cc: "Lum, Lydia" <lydia.lum@utdallas.edu>

Bcc: Maria Shaikh <managingeditor@utdmercury.com>

Hello Helen,

Apologies for what will be a lengthy email, but I think it best for transparency to just include every related policy which intersected with Jade's work and the editing process they experienced.

Fig. 1:



In Fig. 1 you can see the communication I provided Jade alongside the first set of edits for their piece. At no point was it insisted that this Letter to the Editor would not be published unless every change was made. I clarified that all the suggestions and corrections I left were merely suggestions; however, examples would be needed since claims within the initial draft intersected with our defamation policy. What follows is *The Mercury's* policy regarding Letter to the Editors and then our policy covering defamation.

"1.1.7.B- Letters to the Editor

- a) Letters to the editor may only be submitted by current students, staff, faculty or administrators: i.e., the party submitting the LTTE must be strongly affiliated with UTD. LTTEs may be no longer than 500 words in length and all LTTEs must be published with the author's name. LTTEs should be about a decision or article from *The Mercury* that occurred or was published within two months of the LTTE's submission or a topic immediately relevant to the UTD community.
- b) LTTEs are to go through a streamlined editing process in which either the Opinion Editor or Managing Editor will edit the first draft of the LTTE and the Editor-in-Chief will edit the second and final draft of the LTTE.
- c) LTTEs are not mandated to adhere to AP style; however, *The Mercury* reserves the right to make minor grammar and syntax corrections. *The Mercury* also provides edits and commentary to the first draft of an LTTE as suggestions for the author; however, the implementation of edits is not required for publication.
- d) *The Mercury* as a public forum should publish LTTEs submitted to the publication without arbitrary viewpoint discrimination. *The Mercury* reserves the right to refuse publication of LTTEs which espouse blatant hatred towards a discrete and insular minority group. Moreover, *The Mercury* reserves the right to refuse publication of LTTEs which lack a factual basis in their arguments, actively spread misinformation, or otherwise earnestly argue for something that has been definitely established as false (e.g., *The Mercury* will never platform LTTEs which engage in climate change denial, support theories of a flat Earth or proselytize for a specific religion).
- e) The author of an LTTE may only retract their piece before submitting their second draft to the Editor-in-Chief. An author may not retract their submission once the second draft is submitted.
- f) *The Mercury* does not retract LTTEs once published. Corrections and fact checking may be added as notes before a piece, but the piece itself will be maintained on *The Mercury* website indefinitely.
- g) Since LTTEs directly discuss an action of *The Mercury*, it is permissible for *The Mercury's* editorial board to publish an Editor's Desk article politely and professionally answering any questions made by the LTTE and admitting fault when appropriate. The Editor's Desk should never be used as a bludgeon against an LTTE and should only accompany or answer if used at all." Excerpt from **Mercury Policy Compendium §1.1.7.B Outside Article Submissions:**

Letters to the Editor.

"c) Libel and defamation are the main legal concerns *The Mercury* must constantly be aware of when providing news coverage; however, while these concerns should be most prevalent within news coverage, no section of *The Mercury* is free from these concerns. Defamation is any false information that harms the reputation of a person, business or organization. Defamation includes both libel and slander. Libel generally refers to defamatory statements that are published or broadcast. Slander refers to verbal defamatory statements. The effects of slander are fleeting compared to the more wide reaching and more permanent effects of libel. Defamation allegations are some of the most common legal problems for a news organization, but *Mercury* staff can minimize their risk of ever incurring such allegations, regardless of their validity, by adhering to *The Mercury*'s ethical standards of truth and fairness. If allegations of defamation are made against *The Mercury* or a current member of *Mercury* staff, then upper management should immediately contact the Student Press Law Center." Excerpt from **Mercury Policy Compendium §1.6.1.c Legal Resources: When to Contact Lawyers.**

Here is our policy regarding our journalistic ethics and standards:

"1.1.6.J- Mercury Code of Ethics

a) The Mercury uses the code of ethics of the [Society of Professional Journalists](#).

b) Members of The Mercury believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. Ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough. An ethical journalist acts with integrity as they serve the campus community.

c) Members of The Mercury should uphold the four key ethical principles of the SPJ in all their professional actions.

d) Seek Truth and Report It: Ethical journalism should be accurate and fair. Journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

e) Minimize Harm: Ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect.

f) Act Independently: The highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism is to serve the public.

g) Be Accountable and Transparent: Ethical journalism means taking responsibility for one's work and explaining one's decisions to the public." Excerpt from **Mercury Policy Compendium § 1.1.6.J: Ethics: Mercury Code of Ethics.**

The SPJ provides a useful list of considerations and standards, of which the following specifically apply to the *Mercury* management's board decision to apply a disclaimer before Jade's letter:

- Provide context. Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting, previewing or summarizing a story
- Label advocacy and commentary.
- Never deliberately distort facts or context, including visual information. Clearly label illustrations and re-enactments.
- Seek truth and report it

It is not within the scope of *The Mercury* to do active coverage of Israel and Palestine, so instead we defer to the factual information made available by organizations such as the United Nations, Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch to name a few. The reason for the disclaimer is primarily that Steinberg's final draft presents the situation in occupied Palestine in a manner incongruous with the most recent findings from humanitarian experts and intergovernmental bodies. For that reason, additional context regarding the UN's findings on the actions of both Israel and Hamas was provided.

The first sentence is the main cause of concern when it comes to factual accuracy, specifically the section where Steinberg writes "the horrific Oct. 7 massacre during which the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas killed over 1,200 innocent civilians, burned babies, raped women and took hostages, Jewish students."

"Over 1,200 innocent civilians" is a misrepresentation of the tragic Israeli deaths on October 7th. The [Human Rights](#)

[Watch](#) currently places the death toll at 1195 which includes both civilian and military forces. Human Rights Watch reported that "Agence France-Presse cross-referenced numerous data sources to determine that 815 of 1,195 people killed on October 7 were civilians." These death toll estimates are neither over 1,200, nor are they composed entirely of civilians. Furthermore, Jade Steinberg did not provide a source for the number they used. Steinberg still had 91 words available to them and could have included factual details with sourcing.

After the misleading death toll, Steinberg presents a series of allegations regarding the atrocities committed by Hamas on October 7th. Again, no sourcing was provided for any of these claims. Investigations are still on going into the October 7th attack, but groups such as the [Associated Press](#), [Al Jazeera](#), [PBS](#), [The Intercept](#) and the [Washington Post](#) have all covered the complex discourse surrounding October 7th and the associated allegations, with emphasis on the difficulty of writing history in real time in a war zone and the various false and debunked claims that had been initially made in the aftermath of October 7th. The issue here is that Steinberg did not provide sourcing and examples for claims being made of fact.

Steinberg was not required to implement every change we suggested; we make every effort to clarify to our outside authors that our comments and suggestions are precisely that: suggestions. However, as a newspaper, anything presented as a factual claim needs to be supported by fact, otherwise it should be clearly presented solely as opinion. The decision to include a disclaimer allows us to run Steinberg's and other students' pieces and serve as a platform for community voices while protecting The Mercury from defamation or misleading its readers through factual inaccuracies.

I hope this helps clarify our policy and choice to implement a disclaimer on Steinberg's Letter to the Editor. If you have any other questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out and we would be happy to provide further information.

Also, while we are happy to run your Letter to the Editor in our upcoming issue, the current iteration would include a disclaimer that clarifies that censoring opinions is not a condition for publication. We can provide suggestions and comments if you wish, but we are also open to running it as it stands with the disclaimer if you so wish.

Best regards,



THE MERCURY | UTMERCURY.COM

Gregorio Olivares Gutierrez

Editor-in-Chief

phone: +1 (214) 600-6245

email: editor@utdmercury.com

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Roth, Helen <helen.roth@utdallas.edu>

Mon, Aug 26, 2024 at 2:07 PM

To: "Olivares Gutierrez, Gregorio" <editor@utdmercury.com>

Cc: "Lum, Lydia" <Lydia.Lum@utdallas.edu>, "Huffenberger, Jenni" <jennib@utdallas.edu>, "Smith, Amanda" <amanda.smith@utdallas.edu>, "Roth, Helen" <helen.roth@utdallas.edu>

Good afternoon,

It is difficult to believe The Mercury's "main cause of concern" was Steinberg's summary of events before he launched into the heart of his opinion piece, particularly after the comment about false and debunked claims regarding Oct. 7 and the mathematical explanation. However, I will grant you the benefit of the doubt and use this as a teachable moment.

The essence of Steinberg's opinion piece is that with the rise of blatant antisemitism at UTD, many

Jewish students no longer feel welcomed on campus.

Jewish students pay the same student fees as all other UTD students. These fees support the student newspaper and pay the student staff stipends. The underlying assumption, and thus the responsibility and obligation of the entire student staff, is that the newspaper be professional, objective, and representative of all students.

The official Student Media bylaws are linked on the UTD website. Editorial freedom is granted with the caveat: *the editorial and broadcast freedom of student journalists involves the obligation to avoid libel and slander, the use of obscene material, undocumented allegations, attacks on personal integrity and techniques of harassment and innuendo.* <https://studentmedia.utdallas.edu/docs/StudentMediaBylaws-010518.pdf>

Regarding Steinberg's opinion piece, The Mercury ignores his sorrow and uses an editorial disclaimer to rebuke him. Furthermore, the commentary inserted into the disclaimer exemplifies the paper's bias.

In the excessive *edit suggestions*, Steinberg is put on notice that if certain wording were not changed, it would be considered libel and defamation, and the article would not be published. However, there was no libel or defamation on his part, and sources were supplied as requested. Ironically, the student media bylaws require student staffers to sign a libel and ethics agreement before publishing, assisting, or broadcasting within their respective medium.

The Mercury often quotes the UN as a source; however, the paper uses "Zionist Entity" and "Occupied Palestine" in place of the proper name, Israel. The UN recognizes Israel as a sovereign state, not an entity. Therefore, the paper should use the name Israel or insert a disclaimer. Choosing when to use a source and ignoring it when it doesn't fit a preferred narrative is another example of bias, as is the representation of only one side of a conflict.

The tragic Israel-Hamas war continues to be devastating for Christians, Muslims, Jews, Druze, Bedouins, Palestinians, and Israelis alike. Much is beyond our control, but we can focus on the closing sentiment of Steinberg's opinion piece: "Together we can eliminate hate on campus and find ways for all to coexist in peace."

So yes, per your offer, I stand behind my opinion piece as written and grant permission to publish the entire unedited email string as one lengthy letter to the editor. I also request The Mercury publish an apology for Steinberg.

Sincerely,

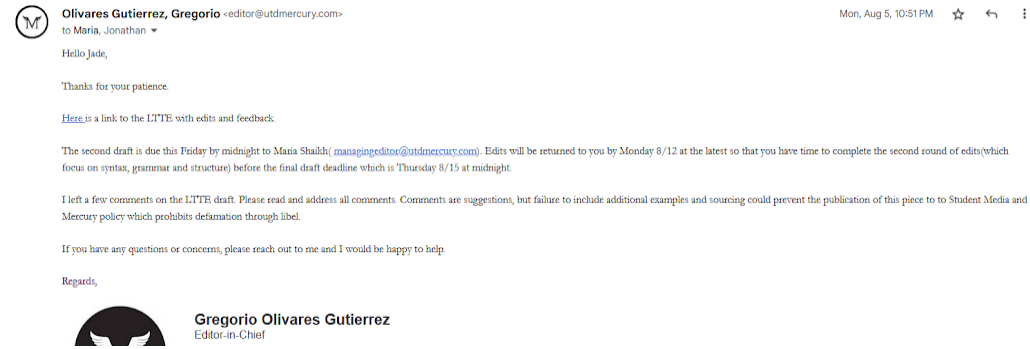
Helen K. Roth

From: Olivares Gutierrez, Gregorio <editor@utdmercury.com>
Sent: Thursday, August 22, 2024 5:55 PM
To: Roth, Helen <helen.roth@utdallas.edu>
Cc: Lum, Lydia <Lydia.Lum@UTDallas.edu>
Subject: Re: Letter to the Editor: In response to the editor's disclaimer on the August 19 Letter to the Editor: Campus Antisemitism

Hello Helen,

Apologies for what will be a lengthy email, but I think it best for transparency to just include every related policy which intersected with Jade's work and the editing process they experienced.

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