



Southern Illinois University System

ONE SYSTEM | MANY LOCATIONS | STATEWIDE IMPACT

September 2, 2026

Dear Ms. McMullan and Mr. Hiestand,

The University is in receipt of your August 12, 2026 correspondence addressed to Ms. Paula Bridges, and this letter is in response to same.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville values the principles of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, and for decades has sponsored *The Alestle* student publication and supported efforts to train student journalists. The Office of University Marketing and Communications remains ready to work in good faith with *The Alestle*, its advisor and student reporters.

The issue at hand for the University has never been its commitment to free speech or freedom of the press but, rather, repeated inaccuracies in *The Alestle*'s published reports and their reluctance, and in some cases failure, to correct inaccurate information. For example, it appears that your organizations have also received false information from representatives of *The Alestle* that Director of Communications Ms. Nicole Franklin has secretly recorded an interview with a student reporter, based on the inclusion of such misinformation in your August 12th correspondence, and similarly false assertions have been printed by *The Alestle* in the past. We assume that all parties understand the importance of accurate reporting, and efforts to achieve truthful and accurate reporting should not be confused or conflated with anything else. This is the reason why University Marketing and Communications has requested to sit in on interviews with University administrators. It is also important to note this is a practice that is extremely common in media relations with journalists across various mediums and is not unique to interviews being conducted by *The Alestle*.

Further, for clarification, please be advised that there is no "blanket restriction" requiring all University employees to obtain supervisory approval or prohibiting them from discussing their work, as is implied in your letter. As has been previously stated, the University's primary concern in this regard is for the accuracy of statements quoted and assertions made by *The Alestle*, as well as any other publication, where individuals are speaking on behalf of the University. Student reporters have always been, and remain, free to gather information as they see fit, and to identify and interview individuals who may have relevant information or opinions. The University distinguishes this from requests for University administrators to speak on behalf of the University regarding its policies or practices. In that circumstance, requests have been made for a Marketing and Communications representative to sit in on interviews, not to quell speech but to ensure accuracy of information that is being presented as statements on behalf of the University.

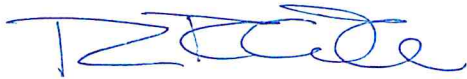
Office of General Counsel

Sept. 2, 2026

Page 2

Regarding your concerns raised about interview procedures, Marketing and Communications representatives will continue to address such inquiries with *The Alestle's* advisor. Also, the administration will continue to request corrections to stories that contain inaccuracies and may choose to issue its own statements when needed corrections do not occur. We believe this approach is consistent with our support of freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

Best,



Phyleccia Reed Cole
Senior System Counsel
Southern Illinois University

cc: Dr. James T. Minor, Chancellor
Ms. Paula Bridges, Executive Director, University Marketing and Communications
Ms. Nicole Franklin, Director of Communications