

It's no secret that for years Rev. Lawrence Biondi, S.J., has wanted Meyer gone. Perhaps it's because time after time Meyer stands with students while the university president would rather he toe the administrative line.

Certainly Meyer has been forthright in his criticism of the administration over the years, but never was he spiteful and vindictive. This lawsuit is both, and now, his students stand with him.

There's a petition circulating in support of Meyer, found at <http://ipetitions.com/petition/messagetoslu/>. I urge anyone who values the freedoms of the student press and a great educator, mentor, adviser and friend to join me in signing it.

*Patrick Powers*  
*Arts and Sciences '00*  
*Editor-in-Chief, 1999-2000*  
*The University News*

## **Biondi & Lay Board To Take Over SLU Student Newspaper (Updated)**

steve May 2nd, 2007

Not content running the athletics program at Saint Louis University, Fr Biondi seems to want to get more involved in the student newspaper. It is not uncommon for a university President to dislike the student newspaper as often they may not back the administration fully. The point of journalism, even on a university campus, is to present all sides of an issue — even those counter to administrators. Basically the university wants to change the charter so they control the editorial advisory board, and hence the viewpoint of the paper. As lessons go, this might be good for the students in this day of corporate media conglomerates.

I received the following, written by someone close to the situation:

*Today, April 30, the Editorial Board of the University News and the current and newly-elected presidents of the Student Government*

Association met with the Vice President of Student Development Kent Porterfield and Provost Joe Weixlmann. (Dr. Avis Meyer, the "unofficial adviser" of the U.News and my attorney Tim E. Hogan were asked to leave before the meeting began, or Weixlmann refused to conduct the meeting. They waited outside). The aforementioned students were then given two options:

1. That the students who want to write for an independent U.News would be allowed to do so, possibly under a different name that would be located off-campus, and would not be supported financially by the University. Existing debts to the University would have to be paid in full, and any monies in the current University News account would be subject to "a conversation" as to whether or not they would be given to this independent entity. There would be "some distribution rights on-campus." It was not clear as to whether or not there would be a future for this independent paper after current members of the Editorial Board graduate.

2. Should the students choose to be involved in a "University-sponsored" publication, operated on behalf of the University, those students and that paper would operate under a new charter. The charter, for all intents and purposes, is similar to the current charter, in that the paper would be semi-independent, and the administration is responsible for appointing an adviser, and members to the advisory board. This paper can adopt its own constitution and bylaws, and is expected to uphold the "Jesuit Catholic" mission statement of the University. The Board of Trustees will no longer hold the charter; and will not have to vote on any changes to the organization. The charter creates a new position of a Student Media Coordinator, who oversees the Newspaper Production Adviser (the latter of which will be selected with "input" from the editorial staff, the advisory board, the VP of Student Development, and the Student Media Coordinator). The advisory board become strictly advisory in nature, and no longer has the

*ability to vote on anything affecting the U. News. The caveat? The Editorial Board and the Editor in Chief will be nominated by the Advisory Board to the VP of Student Development, and the VP will either approve the nomination or request another recommendation be submitted. The VP of Student Development can also dismiss or suspend any student editor for "misconduct or failure to perform their responsibilities adequately." In essence, the entire editorial staff of the paper will be University employees, at the whim of the VP of Student Development.*

*The Ed Board asked many questions, and the gist of the conversation was this: The students must individually choose which publication they would rather work for, and report back before the end of the University's fiscal year which is June 30th. Regardless, the Board of Trustees will vote to rescind the current charter of the University News and then this new charter will be held and upheld ONLY by the Office of Student Development. While the new charter stresses the independence of the paper, the hiring and firing of the editors makes the paper beholden to the University, and will instill great fear in the hearts of the students.*

As a SLU student I fully support a paper which remains free of interference from the administration. Otherwise, you simply have a paper that is nothing but a fluff PR piece. The university puts out enough fluff already either through their own means or publications like the St. Louis Business Journal (one sided pieces on the arena tax issue). This is a simply power grab and an attempt to squash independent thought.

The Alumni from U. News are organizing in protest, I received a copy of this email:

*Fellow U. News alumni,*

*On Monday afternoon the student editors of the University News*

were summoned to a meeting with Provost Joe Weixlmann and VP-Student Development Kent Porterfield. At the meeting, which Avis Meyer was not allowed to attend the meeting, the students were presented with a new charter for the paper that would be put before the university trustees this week. ✖

As most of you know, the newspaper's independence from administrative interference is guaranteed in the existing charter. The proposed charter, however, would allow university administrators to wield an unbelievable amount of control over the student press.

For instance, any candidates for editor positions would have to be approved first by an advisory board appointed by the university, and then the presumptive editor would have to be approved by the VP for Student Development before taking the position. And those editors, if they upset the university through the paper's news coverage or editorial positions, could be removed at will by the university.

Also, the university will solely be in charge of selecting the advisor, and have a strong suspicion that Avis Meyer will not be SLU's preferred choice.

Most troubling, especially for an institution of higher learning, it looks like SLU will not allow the student editors or anyone else to be present during the trustee's deliberations to argue in favor of the existing charter.

The trustees' executive committee will vote on the proposal on Thursday. I'm not sure if this would require a vote of the full board, but if it does that would happen on Friday.

Diana Benanti, the very capable editor of the paper, has asked for the alumni to help out and raise hell. Here's what you can do:

1. Pass this email on to all the folks that I have forgotten. [Or pass

*this post along to others]*

2. Call SLU. Here are the relevant numbers - VP-Student Development Kent Porterfield (314-977-2226); Provost Joe Weixlmann (314-977-3718); the Rev. President Lawrence Biondi (314-977-7777). [Link to SLU Administration page]



3. Contact the trustees. I don't have numbers, but if you know any of these folks or do business with them, call them. Hopefully some enterprising you U Newsers will supply us old cranks with some phone numbers for these pezzonovan

Sent 373 of 1395

To: beckie.supiano.chronicle@slu.edu,com@slu.edu

Subject: more recent background

CC:

Date: Fri, 21 Mar 2008 14:47:40 -0500

Status: Normal

From: "meyerae"

Reply-To: meyllerae@slu.edu ( Add to: [Pick List](#) or [Address Book](#) )

Attachments: [chronicle](#)

Messages from the provost to me ... message from the president to the entire university.

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(Sent Tuesday, Aug. 22, 2006)

Avis - I am writing to update you on some actions planned and taken with respect to the UNews. As you may know, I learned for the first time this past spring semester that there had been a support position for the paper several years ago which provided writing and copyediting support to students but which got swept in a budget cut prior to my time in the Provost's Office. In turn, I asked the Advisory Board to consider whether or not it made sense to reintroduce that position, using funding from my office. Just before graduation, they urged that I do so, and I have been working with our new Vice President for Student Development, Kent Porterfield, since his arrival on campus mid-summer, to prepare to launch a search for that position. We are about ready to get that process underway.

I also learned this past spring about the paper's charter and have, since that time, been trying to get a better handle on the implications of that document vis-à-vis this office and the Student Development division. It is clear to me that, while many aspects of the charter have arguably been followed "in spirit," few provisions have been followed to the letter, and still others have been more or less ignored.

Thus, I have also been working with Kent to try to get a better handle on how we might better meet both the letter and spirit of all extant provisions. In part, this will mean working with the Advisory Board, and it will also mean that the Provost-appointed advisor will need to play a more active role than I understand has been played in recent years.

Further, it means that the paper's budget needs to be reviewed, as the charter states it should be. This review, which needs to be robust, and to involve the Board, has been begun in a modest way, and one outcome has

been that Student Development has asked that the stipend you have been paid as the paper's "unofficial" advisor, which is not in accordance with the charter, be suspended.

Please know, Avis, that this decision is in no way meant to limit your interaction with students, which

students and faculty tell me has been extremely valuable over the years. At the same time, know that it is my intention to bring more financial and staff support to the UNews through the (re)creation of the writing/copyediting position and through actualizing the role the paper's appointed advisor is to play per the charter.

I am writing rather than speaking these words because I wasn't sure that I could contact you, and I did not want any more time to intervene between your learning of this change and its implementation. Not only am I available to speak with you about this and related matters, Avis, but I would ask that you contact Mary Ann Fox, my administrative assistant, at ext. 3718 to set up a time when we might speak. You obviously have a lot more knowledge of the past with respect to the paper than I do, and I would like to hear your perspective about the paper's greatest needs as we seek to strengthen our support of the UNews.

All good wishes, and sincere thanks Joe W.





# SLU vs. communications professor

**BARRED:** University says former adviser of the student paper should stay out of offices.

**ISSUES:** The move is the latest round in an ongoing battle between school and professor.

By Kavita Kumar  
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

The prickly relationship between St. Louis University administrators and a communications professor has worsened, with the university last month barring him from the student newspaper office.



The move follows a federal suit the university filed against Avis Meyer last year alleging copyright and trademark infringement after he formed a non-profit corporation with the same name of the student newspaper.

The University News Meyer, a tenured professor, was once the newspaper's official adviser and has continued to volunteer his time on production nights, as he has done for decades.

But SLU says that has to end. "In my professional judgment, your presence in the newsroom, on balance, no longer contributes to the smooth functioning of the paper and is not advancing students' best interests," SLU Provost Joseph Weikmann wrote in an e-mail to Meyer a few weeks ago.

If Meyer doesn't comply, Weikmann wrote, "I will be forced to take actions to block your access to the newsroom." But Meyer remains steadfast, saying the students want his help. He added that it "should be

PLEASE SEE SLU B5



Case 4:07-cv-00733-CET Document 74-4 Filed 07/11/08 Page 9 of 20

# SLU professor is barred from paper's offices

“an interesting scene” if the university tries to physically stop him from going to the newspaper office.

“I’m not backing down,” he said.

University spokesman Jeff Fowler said some students have told administrators privately that Meyer’s disagreements with the university’s appointed newspaper adviser have created confusion and a tense atmosphere. Fowler said the suit is an unrelated issue.

In the spring of 2007, SLU began rewriting the newspaper’s charter, a move that some student editors believed was an attempt to take editorial control of the paper. But SLU officials repeatedly have said their aim was to improve the quality of the paper, which they said was plagued with grammatical and reporting errors.

Meyer said he formed the nonprofit corporation using the name of The University News and SLU in case students

wanted to take the newspaper off campus.

Meyer notes that he terminated the corporation last summer after students decided to accept the changes and stay on campus. He says that ought to have ended the matter.

But the university filed suit in October seeking assurances that he will not use the university’s name in the future and reimbursement of its attorneys’ fees. Those started at about \$6,000, and the meter is running.

Fowler said the university had no choice but to sue Meyer when it didn’t hear from him on those issues.

“We have to protect our intellectual property just as any other institution does,” Fowler said.

Meyer, who has hired an attorney, says he believes the real reason for the suit is because SLU officials blame him for the newspaper’s sometimes critical editorials about the administration and school policies.

“In my opinion, Biondi is a very vindictive man and he’s out to get me,” Meyer said, referring to the university’s president, the Rev. Lawrence Biondi. “He’s convinced, I believe, that every time something goes in the paper that (attacks or makes fun) of him that I’m behind it.”

While he acknowledges that he is often critical of Biondi,

Meyer said his function at The University News consists mainly of helping out with copy editing — fixing grammar and writing headlines. He said he only gives students story ideas and feedback when they ask for it.

(Meyer also worked as a part-time copy editor at the Post-Dispatch for more than 20 years until he took an early retirement buyout a couple of years ago.)

Fowler said the university knows that it’s common for student newspapers to be critical of university administrations, and the university, he said, is doing nothing to abridge the freedom of the press.

## BIONDI: IT’S ‘A SHAME’

In March, Biondi addressed the issue in his monthly e-mail to the university.

He said then that the university “has been forced to spend over \$18,000 to protect its interests.”

“In these challenging economic times when SLU must stretch every dollar to fund scholarships, salaries and other operating expenses, it is a shame that the University has to use its resources to defend its trademarks and intellectual property from Dr. Meyer,” Biondi wrote.

Biondi also denied that the suit — and the charter changes — were an attempt to influence the newspaper’s coverage.

“Nothing could be further from the truth,” Biondi wrote. “As a matter of fact, the changes last spring to the charter for The University News have produced a much better newspaper, and one that is, by the way, no less critical of me and my administration!”

A group of students, alumni and friends have started an online petition in support of Meyer that has more than 275 signatures to date.

## A NEW ADVISER

Over the summer, the university hired Jason Young to be the first full-time staff person devoted to advising the newspaper. So now that the school has Young on board, there is no need for Meyer to be a second adviser, Fowler said.

“We think it serves everybody to have one voice as an adviser,” Fowler said. “You shouldn’t have two people with different ideas causing confusion.”

Fowler added that Meyer is free to meet with students outside of the newsroom.

Adam Tamburin, a SLU senior and the current editor-in-chief, said that the newspaper is not taking a position in the dispute.

Andrew Emmerich was the newspaper’s op/ed editor in the fall of 2007 and graduated in December. He said Young and Meyer would sometimes disagree on ideological issues, such as whether the newspaper should write about its charter fight with the university. Emmerich said he found that dialogue exciting — the kind of conversations that should be taking place in a newsroom.

“Dr. Meyer is such a valued asset to the paper,” Emmerich said. Besides, he added, “How can you stop someone from volunteering his time?”

Katie Lewis, last year’s editor-in-chief, declined to comment.

The newspaper will put out a summer issue in the coming weeks, but will not resume weekly production until the fall. That is when Meyer could test the blocking orders, if not sooner.

kumar@post-dispatch.com  
314-340-8017

# Funeral notices

## Tributes of Elegance

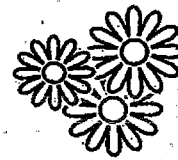
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*"We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give."*

- Sir Winston Churchill  
(1874-1965)



# Prof's legal troubles continue

By KATIE MADGES

*Editor's Note: Due to the conflict of interests this story presents for the staff of The University News, the members of the Editorial Board have elected not to comment in regard to this story for the time being. As always, we have done our best to present a fair and accurate picture of the story.*

As the summer gets hotter, so does the tension between Saint Louis University administrators and communication professor Avis Meyer, Ph. D. Last month, administrators barred Meyer from the student newspaper office where he had served as the newspaper's adviser and faculty mentor for three decades.

The relationship between Meyer and the administration became publicly strained last year when the University filed a federal suit against Meyer for trademark infringement. The University filed these charges after Meyer personally registered the name of *The University News* as a nonprofit corporation.

In late May, Meyer received an e-mail from SLU Provost Joseph Weixlmann, Ph. D., asking him to stay out of the newsroom.

University spokesman Jeff Fowler said that Weixlmann's e-mail is not the first communication with Meyer on the topic.

"I do not intend to go gentle into that good night," Meyer said. "It worries me that I'm going to give SLU a black eye—but I didn't throw the first punch."

Vice President of Student Development Kent Porterfield, Ed. D., said the litigation and the e-mail asking Meyer to avoid the newsroom are not related.

The University hired Jason Young to be the first full-time adviser for the newspaper. Meyer said the difference between himself and Young is that the latter is answerable

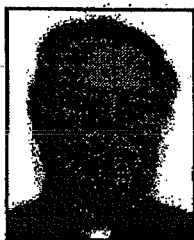
to the administration, where as he is not.

When Meyer continued to attend production nights at the paper after Young was hired, the administration took notice.

Having two advisers in the newsroom contradicting each other can be confusing for students, Fowler said.

He said that students have told administrators that there is tension between the advising styles of Meyer and Young.

"Jason is adviser and it should be his role to do that," Fowler said. "Let him be the adviser."



Meyer

Miriam Joseph, Ph.D., president of the SLU Faculty Senate wrote in an e-mail: "Dr. Meyer has the same right as every SLU faculty member to pursue a grievance or contest sanctions or termination through the channels detailed in the Faculty Manual."

SLU alumni have not ignored this issue. SLU graduates Amy George Rush and Jenny Rolf started a website to represent a group called the Committee to Save Avis.

Both received their bachelors' and masters' degrees in communication from SLU and work for *The UNews* at the same time.

Rush said they started the website to stand up for what they believe the core issue to be—a First Amendment issue.

"Avis is being unfairly targeted from the university for having opinions that are different from [University President Lawrence] Biondi," Rush said. She called Meyer the "victim of a personal vendetta."

Meyer doesn't think the administration understands that "the news staff and I are sort of like family."

He said he is more than an academic adviser and has been more than that for three decades.

"I don't think there are any winners in a situation like this," Porterfield said.

and benefits and lay off employees to increase profits. InBev CEO Carlos Brito says he plans to keep all 12 breweries open in the United States, and St. Louis will become the company's North American headquarters. The famous Clydesdales horses, icons of the company, are also here to stay, for now.

The buyout has some concerned about how the philanthropic arm of the company will fare.

A-B has given more than \$350 million to various organizations, including SLU. InBev said it plans to continue A-B's tradition of giving back but did not disclose how annual giving might be affected.

A spokesperson from the University's Annual Giving Program said the exact amount given by A-B to SLU was confidential, but did say that it has been "generous."

Ellen Harshman, Ph.D., dean of the John Cook School of Business, said that she is not surprised InBev sought to buy A-B.

"In the financial position they are in, it makes them vulnerable, and the [value of the U.S.] dollar encourages foreign investment," Harshman said.

"They want an entry into the U.S. marketplace, and for them this is huge."

Harshman also indicated that the deal would be "in no way good for St. Louis," and she said she was "saddened" to see the loss of hometown headquarters. "It's going to be different if this isn't [A-B's] home."

Harshman said that she also worries that the loss of a Fortune 500 company from St. Louis could hurt recruiting for the business school. She said that the number of Fortune 500 companies in the city is a great selling point for the school. A Fortune 500 company is one of the top 500 annual grossing companies in the United States.

Not only has SLU benefited from A-B, but many graduates of SLU have gone on to work for the company. A notable example of this is the president and CEO of Anheuser-Busch, August Busch IV, who graduated *magna cum laude* from the business school at SLU.

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# SLU BARS LONGTIME ADVISER FROM NEWSPAPER

Google the name Avis Meyer at Saint Louis University and you'll find him described as "one of the most honored teaching faculty on campus."

There's a long list of his teaching awards; an alumni survey called him "one of the 10 most memorable, influential and effective teachers at SLU."

His bio has him teaching journalism, writing, editing and film courses...and serving as faculty adviser since 1974 for the *University News* student newspaper.

But his role as the official newspaper adviser was ended a few years ago by the Rev. Lawrence Biondi, SLU's president. And now, Meyer has been barred from the newsroom altogether.

Many of the students and faculty, including Meyer himself, say Biondi wants to fire him by contriving a case against him to negate the protection Meyer has as a tenured professor.

The long simmering animosity between the two men—Meyer is 66, Biondi 69—has become a bitter personal battle and looks like it's coming to a head. This fall, if Meyer continues to show up at the paper, where the students welcome his advice, that could be the infraction Biondi is looking for to fire him.

During his 20 years as president, Biondi has never met or talked with Meyer. Biondi has said he does not try to control the student newspaper, but Meyer says he gets blamed for anything that appears in the paper that Biondi construes as negative to him or the school. Meyer says Biondi uses bullying tactics in his efforts to stifle the independent voice of student journalists and wants to use the paper for favorable public relations.

### 'Block your access to the newsroom'

Biondi, a Jesuit, stays behind the scenes and has his subordinates carry out the offensive against Meyer, such as when Provost Joe Weixlmann last month told Meyer that his presence at the newspaper as an unofficial adviser, "no longer contributes to the smooth running of the paper" and that Meyer is "no longer to be routinely present in the *U. News* suite as a volunteer."

Weixlmann, in his e-mail to Meyer, said if he didn't

comply, "I will be forced to take actions to block your access to the newsroom."

It created an image of several security men hauling Meyer away—several because Meyer is built like a football lineman. But a physical encounter is not expected, despite Weixlmann's choice of words, SJR was told by university spokesman Jeff Fowler.

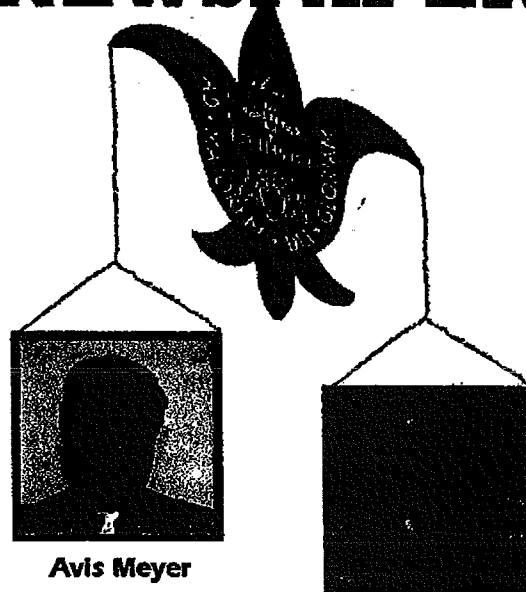
Biondi declined to answer questions from SJR over this latest dust-up, but said he agrees with comments made by Weixlmann. He made it sound as if Weixlmann was doing this on his own initiative. (In 2006, Weixlmann told Meyer his \$1,500 stipend for advising the paper was being ended but "this decision is in no way meant to limit your interaction with students, which students and faculty tell me has been extremely valuable over the years.")

Last October, the university filed a lawsuit in federal court against Meyer, alleging trademark infringement. It was the result of Meyer moving to

incorporate the student paper's name in a non-profit entity at a time last year when the administration indicated it might force the paper off campus. A new charter for the newspaper was enacted by the administration giving officials more control over the newspaper's editors. The threat of having to go off campus or completely online went away. Meyer forgot about his registering the name with the Missouri Secretary of State, but the action would come back to bite him.

While Meyer was out of the country last summer, lawyer Frank B. Janoski of the big downtown law firm of Lewis, Rice & Fingersh sent letters demanding that Meyer give up the claim to the name of the *University News*. When Meyer returned, he complied with the request, but seven weeks later Janoski filed a lawsuit anyway. The suit seeks to have Meyer pay SLU's legal expenses, now said to have grown to more than \$40,000 because of several delays, depositions and requests for information, including Meyer's teaching syllabi for the last 30 years.

Meyer has had to pay out several thousand dollars for his defense, but said he has been advised by his



Avis Meyer

Rev. Lawrence Biondi

by ROY MALONE

lawyer not to discuss the suit. He has made public statements in *SJR* and other publications saying Biondi is trying to weaken the paper and get rid of him—now by using money as a weapon. He was quoted in a *St. Louis Magazine* article as calling Biondi a “weasel.”

### Biondi faults *SJR* stories

Last December Biondi sent an e-mail reply to *SJR* after he was asked about the lawsuit. He said *SJR* favored Meyer in its stories, which he said were not balanced. He noted correctly that Meyer and the author of this story had both worked at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and were co-editors of a few issues of *SJR*.

In the e-mail, Biondi said Meyer sought to use the name of the *University News* “for his own purposes.” He denied wanting to control the editorial content of the newspaper but said it needed to be improved. The administration last year hired Jason Young, 33, as the official adviser to the *U. News*. Even so, Meyer continued to serve as the unofficial adviser and help with the editing.

The editor-in-chief, Katie Lewis, had to attend meetings about the paper with Weixlmann and other officials, but she and the other editors rejected demands by the administration to remove Meyer’s name as adviser emeritus on the masthead.

“There’s no way I would ever ask him to leave,” Lewis said.

*U. News* staffers, past and present, say Meyer never suggests what stories to do but is available to answer questions and helps edit the paper for grammar and style matters on Thursday nights when the paper is laid out.

Fowler, the SLU spokesman, echoed Biondi’s complaint that the administration “never gets a fair shake” from *SJR* and said, “I’m not going out of my way to talk to you.”

But he did, saying Meyer’s troubles were of his own making in that he has refused to answer two questions from the university’s lawyers — what did he do with the name when he incorporated it, and will he try to incorporate it again?

Fowler was quoted in a story by the Student Press Law Center as saying the action to bar Meyer from the newsroom had nothing to do with Biondi but was because of Meyer’s unprofessional behavior.

“This is not Dr. Meyer’s newspaper,” Fowler said. If Meyer fails to abide by Weixlmann’s order, Fowler told *SJR*, he could be subject to administrative action. Meyer’s supporters say this might include being fired.

Actually, Meyer doesn’t have that many supporters among faculty and students who don’t know him. This is attributed to a certain apathy among the student body and a desire by faculty not to get involved. Some told *SJR* they did not want to be quoted for fear they might become targets for retaliation.

### Support from students

But Meyer does have a network of support online mostly from former students who object to attempts to humiliate their former professor. Patrick Powers, editor-in-chief in 1999-2000, said an online petition ([www.ipetitions.com/petition/messagesosluslu](http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/messagesosluslu)) supports Meyer and has gained 279 signatures during several months. The petition calls for the withdrawal of the lawsuit, which it calls “vengeful, vindictive or part of a personal vendetta—traits that threaten to damage and dishonor our university’s mission and history.”

When Biondi sent an electronic communication to faculty, staff and students in March, he said the lawsuit against Meyer was brought because he “tried to willfully take the university’s name.”

Biondi did not explain that Meyer had already relinquished the name before the suit was filed.

Biondi’s reputation among many SLU alums and business leaders around St. Louis is one of a hard-driving executive who has raised the SLU endowment to nearly \$1 billion. He is credited with renovating the university, including new buildings and campus improvements. The physical developments have helped anchor the city’s midtown cultural district.

But Biondi’s temper on campus is well known, especially when he disagrees with others, like the student journalists. They’ve done stories over the years that rankled him, such as: opposition to Biondi’s selling St. Louis University Hospital; a big increase in parking fees; firing of popular priests; an attempt to assess a charge on graduating seniors; campus security problems; Biondi’s apparent plagiarizing of a homily first given by a priest in California; and the stance that SLU is not a Catholic-controlled university, successfully made in a lawsuit to help win \$8 million in tax benefits for a new arena.

The online publication *Inside Higher Ed* had a recent article about how criticism from student newspapers comes with the territory for university chiefs. It began: “Student newspaper advisers are something of

**U. News staffers, past and present, say Meyer never suggests what stories to do but is available to answer questions and helps edit the paper for grammar and style**

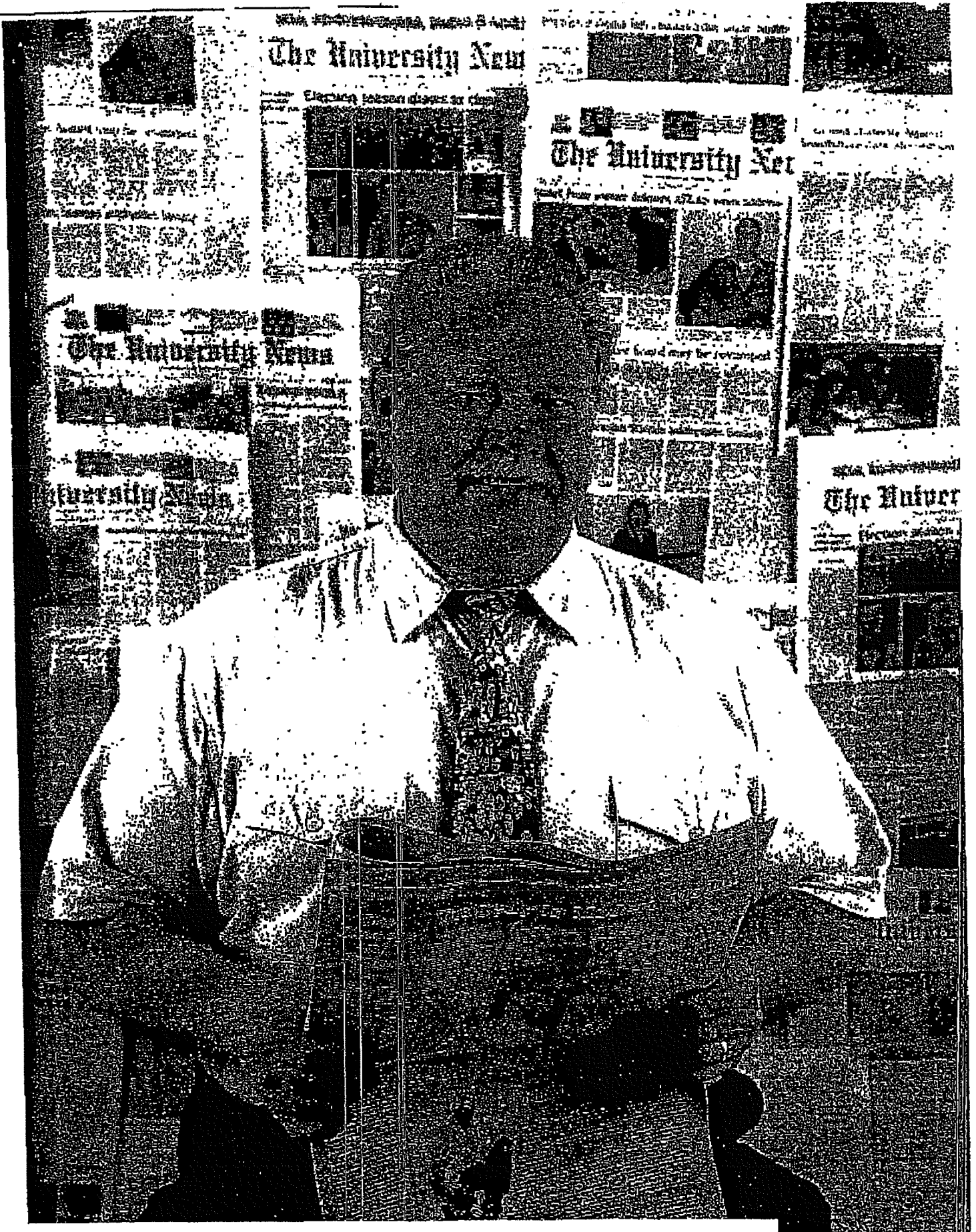
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# AVIS MEYER WILL NOT BE SILENCED

THE UNOFFICIAL ADVISER TO  
SEU'S STUDENT NEWSPAPER  
LOVES FREE SPEECH LIKE HE  
LOVES HIS KIDS—AND HE'S GOT  
A FEW CHOICE WORDS FOR  
ANYONE WHO'D LIKE TO MESS  
WITH EITHER OF THEM.

by MATTHEW HALVERSON  
photograph by KATHERINE BISH





# DEPENDING ON WHO YOU ARE,

the fact that Avis Meyer has tenure at Saint Louis University is either a really good thing or a really bad thing. If you're Avis Meyer, it's a really good thing, because it means you can fight the perceived injustices meted out by an overzealous administration and put an exclamation point on your argument by saying that the Reverend Lawrence Biondi has "all the class of a toilet seat"—all without fear of a pink slip. If you're Biondi, well, it's a really bad thing, because it means you have no choice but to sit back and gnash your teeth as one of your school's professors compares you to a dirty ring of porcelain in print. It's not that Meyer is drunk on his invincibility, slinging ad hominem insults just because he can. The unofficial adviser to SLU's student newspaper started speaking his mind this spring when the school's administrators attempted to make significant changes to the paper's charter and, in his words, "squelch their First Amendment rights and effectively kill the University News as a student voice."

It was the fiery culmination to a tense school year. About the same time last August that provost Joe Wechsman informed the 32-year U. News vet that SLU would no longer allow the paper to provide Meyer with his \$1,500 annual stipend (which had come out of ad revenues and was more or less a reimbursement for the snacks he bought the staff on deadline nights), the university cut the editor's tuition remission in half. And then the whispers started: In the process of transferring to Loyola University Chicago, a former U. News editor learned from one of the school's admissions counselors that word of the

paper's death was spreading in the academic community. Rumors of its demise turned out to be exaggerated, but not by much: In late April, Wechsman and vice president for student development Kent Porterfield met with the staff (but banned Meyer from the proceedings) and presented them with a new charter that proposed giving university officials the authority to elect the U. News editor in chief and fire him or her at will. (At the time, SLU administrators claimed they were just concerned about mistakes found in the student newspaper.)

Official adviser or not, the roly-poly journalism prof launched a campaign to retain the U. News staff's self-governance, asking hundreds of his ex-students who'd gone on to powerful media jobs to tell Biondi, Wechsman and Porterfield what they could do with their new charter. It worked, and the students kept control—for the most part. But the drama didn't end there: Not long after the issue was resolved, U. News' incoming editor in chief got her hands on an email sent to Porterfield from a department VP not involved in the dust-up that said, simply, "Congratulations I think. How does the new charter solve Avis?"

This summer, Meyer sat down with St. Louis Magazine to recount the fallout from SLU's attempt to alter the charter and to make it perfectly clear what he really thinks about Biondi. And given his obsession with protecting U. News staffers' right to speak their minds, it probably shouldn't have come as any surprise that Meyer wasn't about to censor himself.

You were pretty vocal about this situation. I think it's unnecessary. I think it's unfair. I don't even know why they're doing this.

You even took out an ad in the Post-Dispatch, asking people to write in and complain. Yes, I did. It cost \$985. It was a killer. That's how strongly I felt about it.

No kidding—you called out Biondi by name. I said Biondi, Wechsman and Porterfield were trying to take control of the paper and change it to effectively kill it as a student voice. Now, there's a wonderful, cyclical piece of justice to this: Biondi maintains that the paper needs better advising—that's aimed at me. There's an award given on campus called the Chauncey Finch Mentoring Award, and I got it [in May]. It

comes with a \$1,000 stipend, and I thought, "Man, if I could use that \$1,000 to pay for this ad, wouldn't that be justice?" But I don't think they're going to let me.

Did you catch heat from anyone for that ad? No one said a word about it. But I do know that they hired a few people to answer some of the e-mails and letters because they got something in the neighborhood of a thousand responses, and it almost crashed the system—or so I was told by somebody who works in alumni [affairs]. That really made me happy. If we'd actually crashed the system, that would have made my week.

All of those people who wrote in—do you think it accomplished anything? It accomplished something. It's hard to know for sure what, though. If [SLU's] intent was to shut the paper down completely, then we had a pretty good success.

Do you really think that's what they wanted, though—to shut it down altogether? No, they don't want to settle this. They want to control the paper. Period. It was like bargaining for a used car. They shoot for one level knowing that they'll settle for this level. We almost had to do the same thing. I think they did better in the compromise than we did because they have more power and authority.

But if the students still have the power to elect the editor and section editors, then how did you guys come out on the short end? Because until this charter was in effect, they had no input whatsoever and no way to fire anybody. And now they do.

SLU administrators have said they were just concerned by mistakes in the paper and the mixing of editorial and news content. I can pick up the Post-Dispatch every day and find that stuff, so of course it's going to happen in a student paper. They're learning to do it. That's why they call it a college paper.

Have you spoken directly to Biondi about this? No. I've been here 32 years, and he's been there, I think, 19, and we've had three discussions. And they were all hilarious. In '98, this same thing happened, and I was calling my alumni and they were writing letters and griping. Biondi called me and said something like, "I know what you're doing." I said, "OK." He said, "I don't think much



of it." I said, "OK." And then he said, "You know I have a Ph.D. in social psychology," or something like that. I said, "OK, I have a Ph.D. in English." And he said, "OK," and hung up. What do you make of that?

The next time I saw the guy, it was at an awards ceremony in the basement of College Church. We left early, and we walked along Grand Avenue, almost side by side. He had just had a knee operation, so I caught up to him unavoidably. We had this generic conversation for about 20 paces—"The Fox looks busy. Don't the flowers look nice?"—and then we ended up waiting at the corner for the light to change. I crossed the street to the parking lot and he was going someplace else, and to be civil, as he was stepping off the sidewalk, I said, "Watch that knee. I know those operations can be tricky." He says to me, "You're 60. Your time is coming."

And then the last time we talked was a 30-second conversation at another award ceremony, and it was because we were forced to be in the same room. I've got no power or money, so he doesn't care about me.

*[Editor's note: SLU's director of media relations says Biondi has no recollection of having ever spoken to Meyer.]*

You seem to revel in telling these stories. Are you maybe just out to stir things up a little? No, and this is why I think not: I've never done anything but react to what Biondi does. This is reaction. It's not action. If he leaves us the hell alone, I wouldn't have anything to say. But you're right about the degree to which I enjoy this, and here's why: Not everybody knows what a super-wesal Larry Biondi is, and I think they should know. His image is of this big builder and improver of campus, and that's absolutely true. He's done great things for campus and terrible things to people, and it's a wash, as far as I can tell.

So ... how would you describe your relationship? It's almost nonexistent, although I'm sure he sees it as the classic adversarial relationship between newspapers and people in power. I'm told, by almost every student I've known in the last 15 years, that Biondi tends to blame me for the bad coverage he gets in the *U. News*, which is really absurd. I can count on one hand the number of times in any given semester the kids come to me and say, "Should we do this?" I never tell them unless they ask. They're good, bright people.

But you were in college once. You know there's a certain amount of satisfaction to be taken from challenging the establishment. Pulling the tail of the tiger, yeah. There is some of that. And I think that any administrator knows there's some of that. But I don't think this paper has ever crossed the line with that stuff.

The university provides you the space for free. They pay for your utilities and Internet use. They should be able to throw their weight around, shouldn't they? If Monsanto had a paper published with stuff about Monsanto, I'd expect this to happen. But this is presumably a place where learning is important, where ideals are important, and principles are important, and the give-and-take of ideas is important. That's what a university is all about. To clamp down on an organization that disagrees with you and backs it up is almost immoral in a university setting.

**I'VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING BUT REACT TO WHAT BIONDI DOES. THIS IS REACTION. IT'S NOT ACTION. IF HE LEAVES US THE HELL ALONE, I WOULDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY.**

Why not just go independent? It's partially a money thing, and it's partially safety. We might even be able to cover the money; we have good advertising revenue coming in. But finding some place that would be safe would be a big deal. I leave at 1 in the morning. And even when I walk through Grand and Laclede, I watch over my shoulders. Someone said, "Can you imagine the furor that would be raised if we did get forced off campus and we had to get a place that we can afford and it turns out to be really crappy and something happens? How's the administration going to respond to that?"

So going into the school year, what's the mood among the staff? Everybody's apprehensive. I talked to the editor. She's apprehensive about the degree to which there will be some kind of quasi-control or input by the administration, and I told her, "Let's just see what happens."

Any chance of you inviting Larry out for some coffee to bury the hatchet? It would be fine with me. I can't imagine it happening, though. I think it's about as likely as [Iranian president Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad or Muammar Qaddafi and Bush meeting.

Who are you in that analogy? [Laughs] I actually see myself as Ahmadinejad or Qaddafi. I'd let [Biondi] be George Bush—and that's a hell of a comment on Bush.

Do you think that this will be resolved in your time at the university? I hadn't thought about that. I plan to stay until this is resolved. Biondi is going to have to step down before too long. He's been there 20 years, and eventually he's going to have to go on to something else. I don't. I get to stay. Depending on what the next president is like, if he's a wessel-in-training, I'll stick around until I'm 80, or until the *U. News* is truly independent. There is a plan, vaguely in the works—I'm not behind it, but I'm part of it—trying to raise enough "offshore" money to enable the paper to have a secure place to operate from, and we'll go there of our own accord. That's not going to happen in a year. It might happen in three. We have some real big shots who are *U. News* alumni, people with really important jobs, and they have really good income, and they're going to help us set this up.

Wait—so you are thinking about going independent? We're looking into it. Whoever the next president is—and I hope Larry has a wonderful retirement, soon—the first thing we need to do is have the kids go to him and say, "How would you like to make \$500 a month? We'll rent the space from you." One of the things that Biondi and the administration have never said but they must know is this: At the *Post*, the Pulitzers owned everything, so they were the publishers. At SLU, they don't own everything in that office, but they do own the room that we're in. So it's not clear if they're the publisher, it's not clear that we're independent. But unlike the *Post-Dispatch*, the publisher isn't the source of news. At Saint Louis U., they are the source of news. It makes it more complicated. So we understand this. We understand why they get annoyed, but we don't make them do things that make them look silly. ●



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### St. Louis U. bars former newspaper adviser from entering the newspaper's offices

By **Kavita Kumar**

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Monday, Jul. 07 2008

The prickly relationship between St. Louis University administrators and a communications professor has worsened, with the university last month barring him from the student newspaper office.

The move follows a federal suit the university filed against Avis Meyer last year alleging copyright and trademark infringement after he formed a nonprofit corporation with the same name of the student newspaper, The University News.

Meyer, a tenured professor, was once the newspaper's official adviser and has continued to volunteer his time on production nights, as he has done for decades.

But SLU says that has to end.

"In my professional judgment, your presence in the newsroom, on balance, no longer contributes to the smooth functioning of the paper and is not advancing students' best interests," SLU Provost Joseph Weixlmann wrote in an e-mail to Meyer a few weeks ago.

If Meyer doesn't comply, Weixlmann wrote, "I will be forced to take actions to block your access to the newsroom."



But Meyer remains steadfast, saying the students want his help. He added that it "should be an interesting scene" if the university tries to physically stop him from going to the newspaper office.

"I'm not backing down," he said.

University spokesman Jeff Fowler said some students have told administrators privately that Meyer's disagreements with the university's appointed newspaper adviser have created confusion and a tense atmosphere. Fowler said the suit is an unrelated issue.

In the spring of 2007, SLU began rewriting the newspaper's charter, a move that some student editors believed was an attempt to take editorial control of the paper. But SLU officials repeatedly have said their aim was to improve the quality of the paper, which they said was plagued with grammatical and reporting errors.

Meyer said he formed the nonprofit corporation using the name of The University News and SLU in case students wanted to take the newspaper off campus.

Meyer notes that he terminated the corporation last summer after students decided to accept the changes and stay on campus. He says that ought to have ended the matter.

But the university filed suit in October seeking assurances that he will not use the university's name in the future and reimbursement of its attorneys'

fees. Those started at about \$6,000, and the meter is running.

Fowler said the university had no choice but to sue Meyer when it didn't hear from him on those issues.

"We have to protect our intellectual property just as any other institution does," Fowler said.

Meyer, who has hired an attorney, says he believes the real reason for the suit is because SLU officials blame him for the newspaper's sometimes critical editorials about the administration and school policies.

"In my opinion, Biondi is a very vindictive man and he's out to get me," Meyer said, referring to the university's president, the Rev. Lawrence Biondi. "He's convinced, I believe, that every time something goes in the paper that (attacks or makes fun) of him that I'm behind it."

While he acknowledges that he is often critical of Biondi, Meyer said his function at The University News consists mainly of helping out with copy editing — fixing grammar and writing headlines. He said he only gives students story ideas and feedback when they ask for it.

(Meyer also worked as a part-time copy editor at the Post-Dispatch for more than 20 years until he took an early retirement buyout a couple of years ago.)

Fowler said the university knows that it's common for student newspapers to be critical of university administrations, and the university, he said, is doing nothing to abridge the freedom of the press.

#### BIONDI: IT'S 'A SHAME'

In March, Biondi addressed the issue in his monthly e-mail to the university.

He said then that the university "has been forced to spend over \$18,000 to protect its interests."

"In these challenging economic times when SLU must stretch every dollar to fund scholarships, salaries and other operating expenses, it is a shame that the University has to use its resources to defend its trademarks and intellectual property from Dr. Meyer," Biondi wrote.

Biondi also denied that the suit — and the charter changes — were an attempt to influence the newspaper's coverage.

"Nothing could be further from the truth," Biondi wrote. "As a matter of fact, the changes last spring to the charter for The University News have produced a much better newspaper, and one that is, by the way, no less critical of me and my administration!"

A group of students, alumni and friends have started an online petition in support of Meyer that has more than 275 signatures to date.

#### A NEW ADVISER

Over the summer, the university hired Jason Young to be the first full-time staff person devoted to advising the newspaper. So now that the school has Young on board, there is no need for Meyer to be a second adviser, Fowler said.

"We think it serves everybody to have one voice as an adviser," Fowler said. "You shouldn't have two people with different ideas causing confusion."

Fowler added that Meyer is free to meet with students outside of the newsroom.

Adam Tamburin, a SLU senior and the current editor-in-chief, said that the newspaper is not taking a position in the dispute.

Andrew Emmerich was the newspaper's op/ed editor in the fall of 2007 and

graduated in December. He said Young and Meyer would sometimes disagree on ideological issues, such as whether the newspaper should write about its charter fight with the university. Emmerich said he found that dialogue exciting — the kind of conversations that should be taking place in a newsroom.

"Dr. Meyer is such a valued asset to the paper," Emmerich said. Besides, he added, "How can you stop someone from volunteering his time?"

Katie Lewis, last year's editor-in-chief, declined to comment.

The newspaper will put out a summer issue in the coming weeks, but will not resume weekly production until the fall. That is when Meyer could test the blocking orders, if not sooner.

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