

Associated Students of Western Washington University Voter Funded Media Code

I. Preamble

- A. Voter Funded Media (herein referred to as VFM), aims to create more educated and informed voters by using public funds to pay independent, third party media groups that “advise” voters by providing them with more and better information on issues and candidates. As a result, better leaders are elected, leading to better policy decisions from them.
- The first trial took place in the January 2007 Student Government Elections at the University of British Columbia in Canada. No election reform experiment has been attempted before like this in the United States. Western will be a pioneering institution in this field.
 - It is the hope of the AS that VFM creates a more educated voter base, increase participation and discussion in and of campus issues, increase voter turnout, and establish new media groups on campus.
- B. *Be it resolved* that this VFM Code is established to support the educational mission of the Associated Students by providing opportunities in self-governance and civic education, through participation in an election and journalistic process.
- C. *Be it resolved* that this VFM Code is established to ensure that propriety and fairness is carried out through media relations with candidates and with the students of Western.
- D. *Be it resolved* that this Code supports the right of the media groups to advise, present and disseminate information to the student voters in a fair and creative manner.
- E. *Be it resolved* that media groups will be held accountable to all sections of this Code and are subject to penalties for any violations by the media groups themselves or individuals acting under the direction of the media group.

II. VFM Procedures

- A. Dates
1. An Informational Meeting shall be held on the first Monday of February (2/4/2008) for all interest persons and potential groups. The meeting will cover all information regarding the VFM contest, including all information covered within this Code.
 2. A non-public campaign period begins the second Saturday of March (3/8/2008).
 - a) Media groups are allowed to start contacting candidates and arrange for interviews.
 - b) During Finals Week of Winter Quarter, media groups are only allowed to correspond with candidates via email.
 3. Public campaigning and advertising begins on the first day of Spring Quarter (4/1/2008).

B. Registration

1. The registering of media groups will begin directly following the Informational Meeting on the first Monday of February (2/4/2008).
2. Groups who are interested in registering must fill out a registration form stating the media group's name, the names of the members in the group, and sign the Media Group Conduct Agreement. Completed Registration forms may be turned in to the AS Elections Coordinator at the Informational Meeting, or anytime in the AS Board of Director's Office VU 504 until the media group registration deadline, the first Thursday of March (3/6/2008) at 5pm.
3. In addition to the registration form, interested groups must pay a \$50 entry fee at the Viking Union Finance Office, VU 538 by the media group registration deadline, the first Thursday of March (3/6/2008) at 5pm. The receipt must be attached to the submitted registration form.
4. To be considered an eligible group in the VFM contest, and to have the media group appear on the ballot in the Spring Election, both the registration form and the entry fee must be turned in by the registration deadline.

C. Voting Structure

1. On the Spring Election Ballot, after students vote for Board of Director's Candidates, and any initiatives and referenda, there will be a question asking the students to vote on which media groups they liked the most.
2. Media groups will be listed on the ballot in an order determined by random lottery.
3. The method in which students will vote for media groups will be by the plurality system.

D. Voter Eligibility

1. Only current students of Western Washington University main campus are eligible to vote.
2. Acceptable forms of voter identification include a student WWU identification card or photo identification and the ability to provide their WWU identification number.

E. Source Funds and Allocation

1. Let it be known that while Article I, Section A states that 'public funds' will be used to pay media groups, in this first trial of VFM, funding will come from a private sponsorship.
2. The private sponsorship money will come to approximately \$3,500.
3. Allocations of prize money will not be determined until after the Informational Meeting (2/4/2008).
 - a) Registered groups will be contacted with allocation information as soon as it becomes finalized.
 - b) Allocation information will also be posted online.

III. Media Groups

A. Definition

1. Media groups will advise Western students, by providing information through a medium, method and theme of their choice, and competing with other media groups to win student preference and by doing so collecting a cash prize. A media group will be defined as a group of people who complete the registration procedures.

B. Purpose

1. While there is no criterion or content required of media groups, their purpose is to provide information to Western students, about the candidates, and the current AS Governing Body and their policies.
2. It is the hope that media groups ask questions and perform research on candidates and their platforms, to go beyond the basic, and to make candidates more personable and relatable to Western students.
3. In going about the above goals, it is the hope that media groups accomplish them in a creative and enjoyable way to both themselves and to Western students.

C. Eligibility

1. Only current Western students are eligible to form and join media groups.
2. Due to conflicts of interest, certain Western students, and groups of Western students are ineligible to participate in VFM.
 - a) AS Elections Coordinator
 - b) Board of Directors
 - c) Election Board
 - d) VFM Committee
 - e) Election Candidates
 - f) Persons associated with a candidate's campaign
3. The AS Review and Western Front are not eligible to participate.
 - a) However *employees* of both publications are allowed to participate.

D. Advertisement and Campaigning Policy

1. Groups can advertise themselves through internet mediums such as Facebook and MySpace, word of mouth, and hand out publications, or through any other medium available.
2. If handbills are to be distributed, it is each media group's responsibility to insure that those that are not disposed of properly are cleaned up.
3. Groups will have access to the Publicity Center to make and design posters. Any group that utilizes the Publicity Center will be responsible for any charges incurred.
4. Group advertisement posters can go up on all boards in which posters are commonly found.
5. Media groups are not allowed to hang posters from the sides and walls of exterior buildings on campus, as candidates are allowed.

6. There shall be no yard signs allowed on campus that are established into the ground.
7. A table will be available on Vendor's Row beginning two full weeks before the Spring Election, as to provide a central place for media groups to advertise themselves to Western Students, and hand out publications.
 - a) One media group will be allotted the table space per day. The determination of which group will get the table on which day will take place by lottery.
8. Off campus posting is governed by the City of Bellingham ordinance and is not subject to review by the VFM Committee. For specific information on these laws, refer to Section 10.60.110 of the Bellingham Municipal Code.

E. Media Regulations

1. While performing their function as advisors to Western students, media groups shall not engage in slander, libel or defamation, nor will negative slants against candidates be tolerated.
2. Media groups are allowed to endorse candidates if objective reasoning is provided.
 - a) If one candidate is endorsed, the media group must endorse a candidate at all other positions.
3. Plagiarism is prohibited concerning creative ideas or concepts, including analyses of candidates. However, 'stump speech' and platform content will not be considered plagiarism.
4. It is the duty of the media groups to understand the AS Elections Code, and what candidates are and are not prescribed to do in accordance to the election process.

F. Ad Space in Media Publications

1. Media groups are allowed, and in fact encouraged to seek out businesses to buy ad space within their publication.
2. Revenue incurred from such ad space can be kept or used in any way the media group sees fit, in accordance to this Code.
 - a) Includes recovering publication or other related media expenses
 - b) Making a profit

IV. Violations and Complaints

A. Violations

1. Any media group who fails to comply with this VFM Code shall be considered in violation of the Code.
2. Grievances must cite a specific section of the Code and may not include the Preamble.

B. Complaints

1. The date and time that the complaint is received will be recorded on the document, which shall be turned in to the AS Board of Directors Program Assistant.
2. No violation shall be considered unless it is reported by the candidate, media group, Western student, or Elections Coordinator within twenty-four (24) hours of the time of discovery or the next school day, and cites the specific VFM Code

Violation. Grievances will be accepted up to 24 hours after the closing of the polls on the final day of voting.

V. Amendments

- A. This is the official VFM Code, as approved by the VFM Code Review Committee and ASWWU Board of Directors.

VI. Interpretation of the Code

- A. Interpretation of the Code is the responsibility of the VFM Judicial Committee. All questions or matters of uncertainty should be directed to the VFM Judicial Committee Chair.
- B. Media groups and their members are solely responsible for their actions in the VFM contest in regards to the AS Election.