USG student says no conflict

By Tom McKee
Lantern staff writer

Garrett M. Schwartz, business director for The Independent, a student newspaper that has been published twice, said he sees no conflict of interest in sponsoring a USG resolution that urged the Lantern not to publish the words of historical revisionist Bradley R. Smith.

Schwartz, a representative of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, which includes the School of Journalism, contended that he should not have abstained from the vote just because he works for a campus newspaper.

However, Independent Editor Kim Bates said that in the future, Schwartz’s name will not appear on any USG resolutions.

Bates also said she doesn’t want her staff to criticize the Lantern.

But at Friday’s sit-in to protest publication of Smith’s version of the Holocaust, Schwartz held a copy of the Lantern and turned through the pages as he criticized Lantern Editor Samantha Haney’s news judgment.

“Somebody missed a couple of classes somewhere,” Schwartz, a computer science and political science major, told about 150 people who gathered in the lobby of the Journalism Building.

Schwartz said his criticism of the Lantern was unrelated to his position on USG and The Independent.

“If you’ll notice when I was speaking there, I didn’t bring The Independent into it,” he said. “I’m not using the USG to get back at the Lantern.”

However, both Bates and Schwartz were seen recruiting writers at the protest.

When pressed about recruiting, Schwartz said that protesters began discussion about starting another newspaper.

“I just told them that there already was one,” Schwartz said.

Bates said Schwartz’s statements are not “staff opinion.” Schwartz has no control over The Independent’s editorial content, Bates said.

The editorial content of The Independent is based on a majority vote of its editorial staff members, Bates said.

The Independent has not received a request from Smith to place an advertisement, according to Editorial Editor Keith A. Mitchell.

Bates said she would consider running his comments as opinion “if I could handle it in the right manner.”

She commended the Lantern’s approach to the controversy.

Schwartz introduced the USG resolution less than two hours after the Lantern Publications Committee voted not to run Smith’s advertisement. USG suspended normal procedures and approved the resolution that evening.

USG resolutions usually are referred to a steering committee that then refers them to another committee for study.

The normal process takes about a week to pass legislation, said Amy Bashforth, speaker of the USG Assembly.

The resolution concerning Smith’s advertisement bypassed the second committee, Bashforth said.
Now, the Independent fights for life

LOOKING BACK, KIM BATES still questions whether or not she made the right decision. However, the Ohio State University journalism major doesn’t have much choice now. As editor-in-chief, she’s spearheading a student-run, independent newspaper, appropriately called the Independent. Bates and her ragtag band of editors and reporters had hoped to put out the paper’s second issue by mid-January.

“There are times I wonder about what I’ve done,” Bates says. “I want to go along with what we said we were going to do.” Last October, she and nine other Lantern editors either resigned or were fired from their student editorships on the university’s daily newspaper. The exodus had been in the making for weeks, since earlier fall quarter when the student editors discovered a long-standing, unwritten Lantern policy giving the adviser the right to review stories for potential libel. The editors balked when new adviser Mary Carran Webster asked to review several stories. They filled most editorial space in the Oct. 2 issue with the First Amendment, and for weeks the paper ran the words “Publication Under Protest” atop page one.

The stalemate ended when school of journalism faculty voted on a new policy that says, “Stories the adviser feels are libellous will be submitted to independent legal counsel for ruling in cases where the editor does not agree with the adviser.” Because the Lantern is subsidized by the university, Ohio State could be held liable if the paper were sued, the board said. Despite the new policy, several editors still walked.

Some of those former Lantern editors banded together and decided to put out their own newspaper, one without what they called “unconstitutional censorship.” That paper, the Independent, arrived on campus Dec. 5. “I think a lot of people around campus and the journalism building were a little surprised” at the paper’s appearance, Bates says.

The four-page broadsheet was printed and paid for by staffers of the Oakland Post, an independent, student newspaper at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. The Post editors donated the $400 production costs and printing facilities for the 7,000 copies after hearing about the Lantern proceedings.

The first issue, a good effort considering its hurried production, included a front-page look at possible conflicts of interest with Limited founder and OSU board of trustees member Les Wexner’s financial interests; problems with WOSR, the student-run campus radio station; the closing of OSU’s department of photography and cinema; an interview with basketball player Chris Jent, and an editorial page.

According to the paper’s mission statement, “The Independent’s goal is to carefully scrutinize local issues and present them to our readers in an informative and entertaining format.” Says Bates, “We hope to have more investigative stories. Being a bi-weekly, we’re going to have more time to do that.”

The students now face “formidable opposition to starting a newspaper during a recession,” says Kevin Stoner, chairman of OSU’s Publication Board. He cites other obvious challenges: overcoming advertiser skepticism and sustaining student interest. “I would love to see it succeed,” he says. “I wish them well.”

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As of early January, Bates still was searching for advertising and circulation managers. Volunteer business manager Garrett Schwartz, a computer science-political science double major, spent the holidays dropping off copies of ad rates to potential advertisers.

The plan calls for an eight- to 12-page bi-weekly tabloid—with production costs running around $1,250, Schwartz says—to be dropped at campus-area businesses. At the beginning of January, the paper still was in search of a printer.

Money and business savvy seem to be the biggest question marks. "We're good journalists. We're kind of the rebels," Bates says. "We have the talent, but not the resources." Seven of the 10 editors have journalism backgrounds. Bates and the other editors plan to edit copy on their home computers.

Although Lantern editors wrote a gracious good luck editorial in the last fall quarter issue, Bates says there is still some tension among the students. Will journalism majors who work on the Independent be allowed to take the required Lantern courses simultaneously?

Bates says there's no ill will toward the Lantern on the part of the Independent staff. "We don't want to get back at them. We want to put it behind us," she says. "We're moving on and working on our stories."

▼ John Elsasser