

OUR VIEW

UNIVERSITY MUST MAKE INFORMATION PUBLIC

AT ISSUE:
Sunshine
Week
pursues
freedom of
information

Now in its 10th year, Sunshine Week continues to promote freedom of information and open government.

Although journalists started Sunshine Week, media, nonprofits, schools and libraries, among others across the nation, participate in the celebration.

While this week has much larger goals for information as a whole, it is important for the Daily News staff to consider the impact of freedom of information on the Ball State and Muncie community.

We serve as an intermediary for the community, bridging the information gap between administration, students and Muncie residents.

But our role has recently become more difficult. Over the course of this academic year – and in smaller instances in the past – the Daily News has struggled to maintain an open line of communication with Ball State’s administration – specifically, the Office of University Marketing and Communications. These roadblocks are preventing us from informing our readers of

what they want and need to know.

On March 11, two people were stabbed during an incident on Rex Street, an area where students live. The university did not send out a text alert because “there was no ongoing threat,” said Joan Todd, interim associate vice president for University Marketing and Communications. But we were contacted by a student with concerns about the incident, so we followed up on it.

In a similar incident in November, when armed men entered a student’s home, the university did not send an alert because “the situation was contained,” Todd said. The Daily News asked 100 students if they would have liked to receive an alert; 97 said yes. Although the university did not send the alert, we still provided the community with information on the incident.

In recent weeks, university officials have attempted to deny or draw out the process of providing information. We have been closed off to administrators and faculty sources due to a new policy requiring all interview requests to go through Uni-

versity Marketing and Communications. This has created unnecessary complications, especially when some of our reporters have had ongoing, cooperative relationships with administrators.

When the university denies us information, it is not just denying us, but the Ball State community as well.

In September 2014, in an article on military equipment in police departments, the Daily News asked both the University Police Department and Muncie Police Department what military-grade weapons they had. UPD did not release what weapons it had, citing a “security risk,” but MPD, not to mention IU and Purdue University, made public the number and types of weapons.

The Daily News finds itself at an almost standstill when trying to communicate with the administration about opening up these lines of communication and respect.

The university should not retreat from information requests, and officials should not try to prevent us from information we are legally privy to.

It doesn’t have to be this way. Thanks to the cooperation of the athletics department, we have been successful in providing complete coverage. We were able to inform our readers of student fee procedures, changes happening in various sports and the money available to student athletes.

When a department is open with us, we strive to cover it professionally and accurately. The university should give us the opportunity to do the same for all departments and the administration. We must be professional and open on both ends of the spectrum.

Sunshine Week exists to shed light on the hidden places in government and administrations. The more darkness there is, the more likely that people will wonder if there are things to hide.

We cannot allow these fractured communication lines to be accepted as normal. We invite the university to talk to us about mending this relationship so that we can fulfill our mission to keep the public informed.