

**Statement by National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) Regarding
Student Press Freedoms and Student Journalists
at Grambling University's The Gramblinite**

October 22, 2013

The National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) is troubled by the adversarial pattern that persists between administrators and student media at historically black colleges and universities. NABJ continues to stand in support of a free and fair student press as an important voice that should not be censored.

At the same time, **NABJ believes student journalists should be unbiased** and conduct themselves at all times by the same high ethical standards expected of all journalists.

NABJ is aware that the online editor at Grambling University's The Gramblinite was purportedly fired for allegedly using the student newspaper to report statements from anonymous sources, and to post photos of some of the University's failing facilities.

Another student journalist was subsequently suspended following her participation in a student protest, sparked by complaints about dilapidated campus buildings, and also the University's student-teacher ratio. While both students have since been reinstated to their duties, there remains a larger issue around the **vulnerability of the student press at HBCUS** that must be addressed.

"These incidents involving The Gramblinite **should have been used as opportunities for teachable moments** — especially in a learning environment — on the issues of unbiased reporting, press freedoms and journalistic integrity in the Digital Age, but instead have unfolded as another series of unfortunate events between an HBCU administration and its newspaper," said Errin Haines Whack, NABJ Vice President-Print.

With an eye towards ending this pattern, **NABJ will convene a Student Media Council** to further examine the relationship between student journalists and administrators, explore how to increase independence and improve the state of student media and continue to raise awareness on these issues.

Also of grave concern in the Gramblinite matter is the online editor's **use of anonymous sources** in Twitter posts that was deemed inappropriate by individuals close to the situation. The online editor stated those criticisms are efforts to **censors his/the Gramblinite's reporting**.

"Admittedly there are concerns on both sides of this issue. We are very disturbed that a fellow journalist, current or former, would attack or question the validity or integrity of the student's reporting. As such, we find it imperative that we not only support and lift up the inherent value of the student press, but that we **help ensure student reporters enjoy the same freedoms, protections and considerations as all journalists**, even while adhering to the same principles," said Bob Butler, NABJ President.

"We will not support the attempt to muffle authentic journalism on any level — that does not edify what we represent," Butler said.

NABJ will continue to monitor the Gramblinite situation and situations like it, and will update the membership as appropriate.

—NABJ Board of Directors