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**By: Camden Lazenby | [clazenby2@radford.edu](mailto:clazenby2@radford.edu)**

A Radford University Staff employee removed newspapers from four racks on campus on the night of Sept. 18, according to the Radford University Police Department.

“This Radford University classified staff employee has been disciplined under a Group II offense in accordance with the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Department of Human Resources Disciplinary Policy,” said David Underwood, RUPD’s Chief of Police in a letter hand-delivered by Chad Reed, the Vice President for Finance and Administration and Chief Financial Officer.

The letter said, after consulting with the Office of the Attorney General and the Commonwealth Attorney’s Office, the department determined “the removal of these newspapers did not violate any Criminal Virginia Statue.”

[The Student Press Law Center](#) contends that even if newspapers are “distributed without charge, they are certainly not ‘free.’

The Student Press Law Center contends that even if newspapers are “distributed without charge, they are certainly not ‘free.’ “At many schools, students are charged a student activity fee that entitles them to a “prepaid subscription” to their student media,” says SPLC on its [website](#). “In almost all cases businesses and others have paid to have their advertisements published — money they certainly would not pay if they knew their ad would never be read. ”

After deciding not to pursue criminal charges, RUPD conducted an administrative review into the incident.

The reprimanded RU staff employee took newspapers from four newsstands on the night of Sept. 18, according to RUPD. No one has been connected with the missing papers from the other 18 emptied stands.

The staff employee who removed newspapers went against The Standards of Conduct for Commonwealth employees. [The Standards of Conduct](#) describe Group II as “appropriate for

offenses that significantly impact business operations and/or constitute neglect of duty, insubordination, the abuse of state resources, violations of policies, procedures, or laws.”

A first-time Group II offense can result in a suspension of up to 10 workdays, or a maximum of 80 hours for non-exempt employees. A second Group II offense typically results in termination, per the Standard of Conduct policy for Commonwealth employees.

**RADFORD**  
**UNIVERSITY**

University Police

November 8, 2019

**HAND DELIVERY**

Dylan Lepore  
Editor-in-Chief  
The Tartan  
301 Tyler Avenue  
Tyler Hall, Room 025  
Radford, Virginia 24141

Dear Dylan:

On September 20, 2019, the Radford University Police Department (RUPD) was contacted by you in your role as the Editor-in-Chief of The Tartan, the student-run newspaper. At that time, you reported a large number of The Tartan newspapers were missing from newsstands around campus. You advised that the newspapers were delivered to the newsstands on Wednesday September 18, 2019 and were found to be missing on the following day (Thursday, September 19, 2019).

RUPD consulted with the Office of the Attorney General and the Commonwealth Attorney's Office to determine the appropriate Virginia Statute that was violated by someone taking multiple copies of a free newspaper. Due to the newspapers being taken from free newspaper stands, the removal of these newspapers did not violate any Criminal Virginia Statute. It was advised that RUPD could still administratively review the incident and if the person or persons identified were determined to be Radford University students or employees, these individuals could be charged administratively under the appropriate disciplinary procedure as governed by the Student Standards and Conduct, the Classified Staff Handbook, the Administrative and Professional Faculty Handbook, or the Teaching and Research Faculty Handbook, as well as other applicable Commonwealth of Virginia policies.

RUPD conducted an administrative review into the missing newspapers to determine who was responsible for removing The Tartan newspapers from on-campus newsstands between September 18-19, 2019. Based on the results of the administrative review, it was determined that a Radford University employee took newspapers from four newsstands during the evening of September 18, 2019. This Radford University classified staff employee has been disciplined under a Group II offense in accordance with the Commonwealth of Virginia's Department of Human Resources Disciplinary Policy.

RUPD will make no further comment on this matter since it is considered a Radford University personnel issue, which is not subject to public disclosure.

Sincerely,



David Underwood  
Chief of Police

A PDF of the letter can be found [here](#).

“No additional information will be provided regarding this matter as it is a personnel issue.” Eight hundred copies of the stolen Tartan edition were reprinted and distributed to campus on Sept. 21, during family weekend. Typically, it costs \$748.22 for 1500, 12-page, full-color newspapers; however, because the publisher does cost per thousand (\$39.48), the Tartan was charged \$718.48 for the 800 reprints. Each week the Editor in chief, Dylan Lepore, is paid \$140, and the distributor is paid \$17.50 for two hours of work.

“RUPD will make no further comment on this matter since it is considered a Radford University personnel issue, which is not subject to public disclosure,” said the letter penned by Underwood.

The Tartan had asked University Relations who the classified staff employee is, more specifically how they were disciplined, who their supervisor is, when the university became aware the perpetrator was a school employee, and when disciplinary action began.

Ashley Schumaker, Chief of Staff and Vice President for University Relations, said in an email to The Tartan “Earlier today (Friday, November 8, 2019), the Radford University Police Department (RUPD) completed its initial investigation and subsequent review of the missing newspapers as reported by The Tartan in mid-September. As a result of RUPD’s comprehensive and in-depth process, which included conducting one-on-one interviews and reviewing video footage, a classified staff employee was found to be responsible for taking multiple copies of The Tartan from a total of four newsstands. The employee has been disciplined under a Group II offense in accordance with the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Department of Human Resources Disciplinary Policy. No additional information will be provided regarding this matter as it is a personnel issue.”

The missing Tartan’s featured a story and cover photo on the passing of Steve Tibbetts, a newly hired professor, standing next to a street sign with his daughter that bore their last name. The street sign was labeled dead end, to the shock of university officials.

Smith went on to say in the same email: “I will follow yours [Dr. Susan Trageser] and the president’s lead on this matter, but I am prepared to assist students in reflecting on this poor choice.” Sam Wall, a Radford alum and reporter for the Roanoke Times, provided the Tartan with a copy of the information received in response to his Freedom of Information Act request for emails and text messages sent between university officials about the missing papers.

[An article written](#) by Wall quotes Interim Dean Matthew Smith's email to the Vice President of Student Affairs, Susan Trageser, where he says, "I just got a paper copy of the Tartan and am outraged by what I see on the front page. As someone who has worked with student papers, journalism, and media throughout my career, this is the singularly most insensitive editorial choice I've witnessed in 30 years."

Not quoted in the Roanoke Times article, Smith went on to say in the same email: "I will follow yours [Dr. Susan Trageser] and the president's lead on this matter, but I am prepared to assist students in reflecting on this poor choice."

[The Tartan](#) is continuing to [investigate](#) this matter. This story will be updated as more information comes to light.

**Photo Credit: (Dylan Lepore - The Tartan)**

**Featured Image:** (The Tartan's newsroom in Tyler Hall)