

# *WORKING with the MEDIA*

*A Guide for the ULM Community*



*UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA AT MONROE*

## ***A Guide for the ULM Community***

### ***Why does the media turn to ULM?***

*ULM Media Relations collaborates with the university community to provide important news, and we help the media find information quickly and on deadline. Most importantly, we strive to publicize the significant academic and community service contributions of ULM faculty, staff, administrators and students. This guide is designed to help the ULM community work with the media to promote those contributions.*

#### **REPORTERS RELY ON ULM FOR:**

- *Expert commentary that provides insight, analysis and background information in response to issues in the news. The media often seeks ULM expertise on such matters as court decisions, government initiatives, political activities and international affairs.*
- *Unique “trend stories.” Journalists want to write about new behaviors and activities that appeal to the public and may become part of the norm. These can include such matters as new technology, eco-friendly practices, and alternative energy sources.*
- *Information on new academic programs, classes and research discoveries.*
- *Information on daily academic life and access to higher education, such as tuition changes, campus improvements and new technology.*

## ***Why work with the media?***

- *Speaking to members of the media about your research, scholarship, teaching, or professional expertise promotes ULM as a credible institution.*
- *Providing expert commentary helps the public understand the implications of each day's events.*
- *Keeping people informed of faculty and staff accomplishments fosters support for the university and for your work.*



## **Why work with ULM Media Relations?**

- *Media Relations is designed as the primary conveyor of university news, with the exception of athletic-related news.*
- *Media Relations staff members understand what the media needs; some of us began our careers as reporters.*
- *Media Relations helps you, the faculty and staff, determine the most effective way to share your news.*
- *Media Relations promotes your accomplishments by:*
  - *issuing hundreds of news releases and news tips each month, on subjects such as honors, innovative research, major events, new academic programs, and new publications.*
  - *contacting reporters via e-mail, letters, telephone calls and meetings to interest them in feature stories about ULM.*
- *Media Relations organizes news conferences and other media access events.*
- *Media Relations facilitates radio interviews, TV guest appearances and guest opinion pieces.*
- *Media Relations provides media training.*

## ***What should you do if a reporter calls?***

- *Record the name of the person calling, the media organization and the publication or broadcast station. Ask the reporter to explain what the story is about and what information he or she is seeking from you. Share this information with the Director of Media Relations.*
- *Be prompt, helpful and honest. All contacts from the media should be returned within an hour, if possible. If that is not possible for you, please ask the Director of Media Relations to return the phone call.*
- *If you are uncomfortable with a reporter's request, particularly if a reporter is asking about a potentially controversial issue, call the Director of Media Relations and ask him or her to handle the query.*

## ***What if you are not prepared for an interview?***

- *Tell the reporter you want to help but that you will need to call her or him back within 15 minutes.*
- *Collect your thoughts and write some talking points you may want to share.*
- *If you need assistance, call Media Relations.*

## *How do you prepare for an interview?*

- *Have a message. Create a single communications objective and some secondary points. Plan to use these points as the foundation for all of the questions you will be answering. It is permissible to repeat your message. In fact, that is a good idea.*
- *Anticipate tough questions from the reporter and rehearse your answers.*

## *What should you wear for a face-to-face interview?*

- *It is important that you look professional but also feel comfortable and confident during the interview.*
- *Especially if the interview will be televised, you might consider the following: for men, a solid, dark suit and maroon shirt or a white shirt with a maroon and gold tie; for women, a solid suit and white shirt is appropriate. Avoid plaids, bold stripes, wild patterns and distracting jewelry. Reporters want to represent you as you normally are. If you teach in the Health Sciences or Pharmacy, wear your white coat.*
- *Please also consider wearing a ULM pin. If you do not have one, contact Media Relations.*



## ***Where should you conduct the interview?***

- *Conduct the interview in a location that works best for you and suits the story.*
- *Think visuals. If the story is about your latest research on the benefits of Vitamin E Oil, offer to conduct the interview in your research lab. If the story concerns your artwork, invite the reporter and photographer to your studio.*
- *If you would rather not conduct the interview in your office, contact Media Relations and a staff member will arrange an alternative location.*

## ***How can you ensure a successful interview?***

- *To combat nervousness, take deep breaths and sit up straight.*
- *Make sure the reporter understands that you are not speaking on behalf of the university, but from your area of expertise.*
- *Ask that you be identified as a ULM professor or administrator in the story if you are speaking in your professional capacity.*
- *Control the pace. Pause briefly before answering a question. If necessary, ask for clarification or a restatement. Speak with a measured voice, pausing for effect and emphasizing important words and phrases. Try to avoid verbal tics like “um” and “uh” and “you know” and “kind of” and “sort of.”*

## ***How can you ensure a successful interview?***

***(CONTINUED)***

- *If it is a television interview, make eye contact with the reporter and do not look into the camera. Try to avoid distracting mannerisms like shifting in your chair and moving your hands unnecessarily.*
- *Avoid jargon or technical language.*
- *Speak in short sentences, using plain language. When interviewing on TV and radio, think in terms of 20-second responses. Newspaper reporters can take more time in their interviews, but brief, succinct answers are still important.*
- *Avoid digression and speak as concisely and factually as possible. In general, avoid speculation and the sharing of personal information that might be privileged. It is OK to say, "I don't know."*
- *Do not answer a reporter's question with "no comment." It raises red flags for reporters and editors. If you cannot talk about a subject, explain why you cannot, and say what you can say with confidence.*
- *If you are asked about anything outside of your expertise (such as legal issues, personnel issues, or a campus crisis), ask the reporter to contact the Director of Media Relations.*
- *Smile. Be positive, calm, sincere, and knowledgeable. Make your own points instead of repeating negative words in a reporter's question.*

## ***How can you ensure a successful interview?***

***(CONTINUED)***

- *Offer background information to the reporter. E-mail the reporter additional information that will help him or her better understand the story.*
- *Determine how to personalize and humanize your information. Explain to the viewers or readers how it affects them. Consider using an anecdote to contextualize your explanation.*
- *Remember that there is no such thing as “off the record.” It is an interview, not a conversation. Anything you say or e-mail to a reporter can be used in print or on air.*
- *Offer your telephone number and e-mail address to the reporter so that the reporter can contact you for follow-up questions.*
- *Do not expect to read or view a story before publication. That conflicts with a journalist’s code of ethics.*
- *Thank the reporter at the end of the interview.*

***Higher Education  
Stories in the  
News: A National  
Study Reveals  
Editors' Priorities***

*Oregon State University News Services conducted a six-month study of higher education stories in regional and national newspapers. They examined 2,472 newspaper articles related to higher education published in The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Oregonian, and USA Today.*

*They discovered:*

- *Largest source of higher education stories came directly from **research** studies published in peer-reviewed journals, at scientific conferences, and in books.*
- *Second most prominent source of higher education stories came from **expert** sources who provided commentary on breaking news stories.*
- *Another popular topic associated with higher education was **health**. Many stories attributed to higher education were linked directly to health issues.*



***Both television and print reporters appreciate visuals that help tell a story.***

# WORKING *with the* MEDIA

***If you have any  
questions about  
this guide, please  
contact:***

## **OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION**

### *MEDIA RELATIONS*

*opi@ulm.edu*

*318-342-5440*

***ulm.edu/opi***

University of  
**LOUISIANA**  
Monroe

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