



# MEDIA RELATIONS BEST PRACTICES

## REPORTING THE NEWS

The method of news sharing will be at the discretion of the Office of Communications media relations team and determined on a case-by-case basis in order to maximize publicity for an announcement or event. Tactics used by Brevard's media relations team include:

**News releases:** News releases are reserved for newsworthy items about the College. When possible, submit information for a news release two weeks in advance and include high-resolution photos when appropriate.

**Media pitches:** Sometimes, the media relations team will choose to “pitch” a story to one or more reporters directly rather than issue a news release. Usually, this one-on-one contact allows us to “sell” the idea to the reporter and provide immediate feedback should the reporter have any questions.

**Expert tips:** When a current event coincides with a faculty or staff member's area of expertise, we will suggest that person as an expert to the media. If there is breaking news within your area of expertise and you are available for comment, please contact the Office of Communications immediately so that the media relations team can put you in touch with relevant reporters.

**Press conferences:** There are times when news at the College warrants a press conference. This method of communication is reserved for major announcements. Please remember that the Office of Communications cannot guarantee media coverage. The publication or airing of a story depends on a variety of factors, including the number of staff available at a media organization to work on a story, space in a publication or air time, the emergence of breaking news or a similar story that has been reported recently.

### How do I Know if my Story Idea is Newsworthy?

Please contact the Office of Communications with any story ideas you have, and together it will be determined if it is newsworthy. You may also fill out the [press release form](#) if you



have details about your story idea or event. Even if the item is not deemed newsworthy for external media, the Office of Communications may include it on the College's website or Brevard's internal communications outlets. Generally, journalists rely on the following factors to determine whether a story idea is newsworthy: Conflict/Controversy - Are there opposing viewpoints? Human Interest - Does the story share something about the human experience? Does it put a human face on a concept, idea, or current event? Impact - How does the story affect readers/listeners/viewers? Prominence - Does the story include a well-known person, organization, or place? Proximity - Is the story local? Can readers/listeners/viewers relate to it? Timeliness - Is the story relevant today? Unusual - Does the story relay an out-of-the-ordinary experience? Is this the first, last or biggest?

## TALKING TO THE MEDIA

### DURING A MEDIA CRISIS OR OTHER INSTITUTIONAL ISSUE

Faculty and staff are welcome to talk to reporters about topics within their area of expertise. However, when faculty or staff members are asked to comment on an institutional question or an issue that relates to the entire institution, the reporter should always be referred to the Office of Communications. The director of communications and media relations, in cooperation with the College President will determine the appropriate spokesperson on behalf of the College. The Office of Communications will refer the reporter to the appropriate source for comment or issue a statement on behalf of the College.

### ABOUT YOUR AREA OF EXPERTISE

When a member of the news media contacts a faculty/staff member to comment on a topic within his/her area of expertise (e.g., a faculty member's academic research or area of academic specialization), the faculty/staff member may answer questions immediately. However, if the faculty/staff member prefers to give some thought to the questions before answering, or if she/he has questions about the interview and how to respond, the Office of Communications recommends the faculty/staff member take the reporter's telephone number and return the call as soon as possible. Faculty/staff faced with this situation should consult with the director of communications and media relations, who can share information about the reporter, the angle the story is likely to take, other stories the



reporter may be researching or writing at the time and any other background information that may be helpful in advance of the interview.

The Office of Communications should be informed about all interviews conducted by faculty and staff. Please send an email to the Director of Communications and Media Relations.

#### Opposite-Editorial Pieces for faculty

Opposite-editorials (op-eds) are opinion essays written by experts that are typically published on the page opposite the editorial page in newspapers. Op-eds provide an opportunity for faculty to use their expertise on topics in the news to clarify or correct what has been reported in the press, to provide a new perspective on the issue or to call for further action.

Publication of op-eds written by faculty can call attention to the quality of Brevard's faculty and indirectly highlight the quality of the College's academic programs. The Office of Communications media relations team provides assistance in placing op-ed articles in local and national newspapers. By regularly working with op-ed editors, the Office of Communications remains up-to-date on current trends in newsrooms and current contact information for the major op-ed editors.

Op-eds appear in general-circulation newspapers and are designed for all audiences. The writing level of an op-ed page may be slightly above that of news pages (generally seventh to ninth grade level), but not much higher. Op-eds usually have an 800-word limit. The Office of Communications can assist faculty by providing editing advice and information about journalistic style. Op-eds need to follow the Associated Press Style Guide and accepted journalistic writing practices, which are different from the requirements of academic journals. The Director of Communications and Media Relations also can be helpful in suggesting topics, narrowing a topic, editing and other tasks.

#### **Publicizing Faculty Research Findings**

##### Why should faculty members consider publicizing their research?

News stories about faculty research are read by legislators, citizens, donors and potential funding agencies. Research results can help inform decisions on important public issues. Many grant applications require public outreach and education, and there certainly is a need to improve public appreciation of science and how research benefits society. Popular media coverage makes it more likely research will be seen and cited by other scientists.



Finally, popular media coverage of research often results in valuable contacts with potential collaborators.

Announcements about grants, appointments and awards rarely get more coverage other than brief mentions in local or hometown newspapers. The Office of Communications focuses on research findings rather than general announcements to maximize the likelihood of receiving the broadest spectrum of publicity.

Which studies should be submitted for consideration to become a news release?

In general, studies that are newsworthy tend to have some relevance to readers, their health and their lives; to society and modern problems; or simply are findings that inspire the common person.

However, even some relatively esoteric research has successfully received coverage in trade publications.

If you have a study and are unsure if it could be a news release, send it to the Director of Communications and Media Relations. Email your manuscripts as an attachment and include in your email a few sentences in layperson English explaining what you did, what you found and why it is significant.

When should a study be submitted to the Office of Communications?

Send your study to the Director of Communications soon after you submit it - and immediately upon acceptance.

The Director needs time to read your study, interview you about it, draft a news release, have you review it for accuracy, and then issue it to the media to coincide with publication or with an “embargo,” if there is one.

*Keep in mind:* The Office of Communications does not write news releases on every research project conducted by faculty. To maximize your chances of having a news release written, you must be able and available to explain it in terms understandable and interesting to the news media and the general public.

What is an embargo and why are they important?

Major journals like *Science*, *Nature* and the *Journal of the American Medical Association* impose embargoes on papers they are about to publish. An embargo is a specific time and date before which a study may not be publicized. But journals with embargoes allow research



institutions to send embargoed news releases to trusted reporters a few days to a week or more prior to the embargo expiring so that reporters have time to prepare stories.

For example, *Science* is published on Fridays. The journal's embargo is 2pm (ET) Thursday, the day before publication. *Science* allows universities to issue news releases on studies under embargo as early as Monday morning prior to publication. To do that, a news release must be drafted, edited, and approved by Friday morning a full week before the study is published. This means the Office of Communications must know about a study at least two weeks prior to publication in order to have a news release ready on time.

Embargoes also are important because they provide a timely news "hook" to news stories on studies so the stories can say the study "was published today in the journal X." Most major media will not publish stories on studies after the online publication dates of those studies, which is why it is crucial to have news releases ready to issue at the time specified by the journal in question.

Many journals do not have formal embargoes. In those cases, it is best to issue news releases a week to a few days prior to a study's online publication date so it is seen as new and timely by the media.

#### What happens after a news release is issued?

On the day a news release is issued, and perhaps for a few days afterward – depending on the level of media interest – you must be available to answer media phone calls and emails as quickly as possible. That means in minutes to tens of minutes. The media work under very short deadlines, so a reporter may drop your story and move to something else if they cannot reach you immediately or hear back from you within minutes to an hour at most.

#### What about photographs?

Photos and other illustrations must have resolution adequate for newspaper and magazine publication: at least 300 dpi at a size that might be used in print, at least 4 inches by 6 inches or larger. Photos in jpeg format are preferred. Media generally will not use technical photos with graphs, symbols or legends; unadorned photos are preferred. Photos of researchers should be tightly framed on one or at most two researchers doing something in the lab or field. Most media will not use group photos, so do not submit them.