



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

MEMORANDUM

TO: Cheryl Cardell, CAACS
Suzanne Montague, Information Technology
Pete Smith, Distance Education
Dale Wasson, Student Enrollment Services
Judy Young, International Education

FROM: Dana Dunn 
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: **Media Interactions Procedure**

DATE: February 16, 2005

Attached is information on how our Office of Public Affairs can assist you with media interactions. Please distribute this to unit heads and other relative staff in your area.

The new procedure is for you to refer all media calls to Bob Wright in the Office of Public Affairs. He will then refer these calls back to the appropriate individuals for comment. This procedure will serve us well in that it gives us an opportunity to learn more about the nature of the call so we will have time to prepare.

Thank you for your cooperation with this. Let me know if you have any questions.

DD/cf

As a member of the faculty and staff of the University of Texas at Arlington, you may be called upon to provide an expert opinion or to provide background information on timely news stories. Because UTA wants a national reputation as an academically outstanding university, we want news reporters to look to us as a source for information. The Office of Public Affairs regularly proposes story ideas to reporters. The office also responds to requests for information and experts from national and local media.

Although dealing with the media may sometimes be inconvenient or seem unimportant, part of our mission as an institution of learning is to provide education on a variety of topics to the public. Equally important, such media exposure helps cultivate public support for UTA and your programs by helping the public to understand what we are doing as educators.

How the Office of Public Affairs Serves You and the Media

All media requests should come through the Office of Public Affairs. If a reporter contacts you directly, please notify the Office of Public Affairs immediately. The Office of Public Affairs will assist you in preparing for the interview and generally make things easier for both you and the reporter. For example, we can provide background information, arrange parking, escort the reporter to your office and arrange for the technical needs of the reporter. Also, if you cannot talk to the reporter for some reason, the Office of Public Affairs can sometimes find another UTA source for the interview.

Please notify the Office of Public Affairs when you have an article being published. Reporters often want to stay abreast of the latest information and want to contact authors of these items.

Let the Office of Public Affairs know if you have an idea for a story we could promote to the news media. The office often writes news releases to interest the media in a particular story. Reporters use these releases as background information and often like to do their own interviews. If you have reservations about doing interviews with a reporter, please let your Media Relations Specialist know this before the news release is written.

General Guidelines for All Interviews

Find out all you can about the reporter, the reporter's publication or program. Your Media Relations Specialist will provide you with this information.

Know what the subject of the interview is about and why the reporter wants to interview you.

Be prepared and, if possible, rehearse. A mock news conference should be held before an important interview to prepare the participants. Prepare yourself with the answer for any question. Learn how to turn a tough question into a positive answer. The Office of Public Affairs will help you prepare for your interview.

Never lie. If you don't know the answer, it is all right to say "I don't know."

Try to use “soundbite” answers. The average soundbite is no longer than 30 seconds. That is what most likely will be used on radio or television from all of your responses. Even print reporters use one or two sentence quotes.

Never say “No comment.” Such an answer is often perceived to mean that you are hiding something. Here are some other ways to respond to the question and not give an answer:

“Under the circumstances, it really would be inappropriate for me to discuss that with you at this time.”

“I really can't go into all of the details at this time. If and when we can make that information available, we most certainly will do so.”

“I am sorry, but due to the situation at this time, I am unable to either confirm or deny what you have asked. Please just bear with us a while longer and we will let you know.”

“To answer your question would be an invasion of an individual's privacy. We want to respect that privacy, and I know if you were in a similar situation you would want to do so as well.”

“As much as I would like to do so, I just can't go into that at this time. I hope you will understand.”

Even if the reporter is hostile, try to keep calm and remain in control. Never lose your temper on camera or get into an argument with the reporter, host or even another guest on a talk show.

If the reporter's question doesn't make sense, ask for a clarification and/or help the reporter come up with a question that does make sense. Do not expect the reporter to take on the responsibility to understand your subject or have knowledge of what they are writing about. It is our job to do everything we can to help the reporter to understand the material.

Do not use unfamiliar acronyms, jargon or technical language.

Always make sure all reporter's phone calls are returned by referring the calls to the Public Affairs Office.

Never give information “off-the-record.” Nothing is ever “off-the-record.” Anything you say can be used by a reporter and you can do very little about it afterwards. Remember, the interview begins as soon as you are with the reporter and does not end until you are out of the presence of the reporter. This includes telephone conversations. Conversations conducted in the reporter's presence might be used either as part of the current story or could be used as part of another story. Reporters often repeat “off-the-record” conversations they have had with you to others to see if they will agree or confirm the information. If you don't want to hear it broadcast or see it in print, don't say it.

If you are not the person who should be speaking about a particular subject, or you have no first-hand knowledge of the subject, don't speak. Instead, refer the reporter to another person who is knowledgeable or to the Public Affairs Office.

Don't speculate. Beware of questions that begin with "What if . . .?" Stick to what you know that is a fact. What might be or could be are items that in fact did not happen, so answers should reflect that. An answer might be. . . "I can't speculate about that, but what I do know is . . ."

Questions concerning third parties should be referred to the other party to answer. Be careful not to give your opinions on subjects outside of your area of expertise.

Speak clearly and be brief so your answer cannot be taken out of context or be misunderstood. Try to make your main points in less than 30 seconds.

Take your time to answer. Listen carefully to the question and think about your answer before you speak. You don't have to answer until you are ready to answer.

Some reporters will interrupt and ask another question when they believe they have the answer they want. If you have not fully given the answer you want, then politely let the interviewer or host know that and complete your statement before moving on.

If the host of a talk show or a reporter makes a misstatement in the question, be sure to correct the misleading or erroneous portion before going any further in answering the question.

Television and Radio Interviews

Confirm the topics of the interview before you agree to be on the program. Then confirm again the topics with the interviewer before you begin. Ask if any other topics have come up since you agreed to do the interview. If there are, take time and discuss whether you will agree to the interview if the new topics are brought up.

If you are to be on television, avoid broadly patterned clothing and horizontal stripes. Also avoid solid white, black or red clothing items.

Once you are on camera, hooked to a microphone, or in the presence of a cameraman on location or in a studio, and even before the interview or program starts, do not say anything you would not want to hear broadcast later.

Have an agenda of points you want to discuss and bridge to them during your answers as often as you can during the interview.

On a talk show, don't simply wait for the next question. It is all right to take the initiative sometimes and make points you want the audience to know.

Telephone Interviews

Naturally, the Public Affairs Office is available to you 24/7 to assist you with any media call. However if you chose to talk to the reporter and not refer the call to Public Affairs, here are some important tips.

This type of interview can catch you off guard and be the most dangerous. The reporter might find you in your office or at home where you might be less guarded with your responses. Find out all you can about what the reporter wants to know. Be careful asking your questions because anything you say can be used. If you are the right person to be interviewed, tell the reporter so the reporter will not begin looking for another spokesperson. Then tell the reporter that you will need to get to another phone or assemble your notes, anything, but get the reporter's number and agree to call the reporter back in 3 to 5 minutes. Do not make it longer than 10 minutes or the reporter will begin to look for someone else. During those minutes think about what you want to say and what you don't want to say. Become as prepared as you can and then return the reporter's call.

Remember, the interview begins as soon as the reporter gets on the phone.

Always assume you are being taped. You are. You may tape them too.

Do not engage in casual conversation concerning the topic. It is often something said casually that becomes your statement.

Do not agree to answer a reporter's speculative question or begin to speculate yourself.

If you do say something that you wish would not be used, tell the reporter and ask that the information not be used. Most reporters will agree.

Again, the Office of Public Affairs can assist you at any time.

Print Interviews

The reporter generally will be taking notes but also may have a tape recorder so everything you say can be documented. You may also use a tape recorder so you will also have a record of the interview.

Give the reporter time to write down your answer. Don't talk too fast. Pause occasionally to let the interviewer get caught up taking notes.

This is another type of interview that can become too relaxed and again it is important to be cooperative and friendly but not overly responsive. Remember what you say will be in black-and-white for all to read the next day in the newspaper.

News Conferences

A news conference is a risky event. First of all, holding a news conference can be embarrassing if reporters find your subject uninteresting and few, if any, attend. Remember, a news conference cannot be just an announcement. Questions, some from areas totally away from the subject, may be asked, and the person being questioned must be able to respond quickly and think fast.

Any news conference should be rehearsed. All participants must be prepared.

Expect to have several reporters asking questions at the same time. Do not get upset or flustered. Take your time in answering questions feel free to answer them in the order you want.

There is often a pause at the beginning of a news conference or it might occur in the middle. This is a good time to make several points that you hope will be reported.

Remember the camera can be on you at any time. Be careful with facial expressions and body movement. Don't fuss with your clothes or use annoying gestures.

Keep your hands off of the microphone.

Usually after any formal news conference one or more reporters will want to ask specific or follow-up questions. They may want to interview you away from other reporters. This may mean repeating some of the same answers. Again, do not be frustrated if the same questions are asked again.

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