

Procedures: **Interacting with Media Guidelines**

Associated Policy: N/A

Procedure Holder: University and External Relations

Original Date: May 2019

- 1. Create space.** If contacted by the media, find out the reporter's deadline and ask to call them back. Give yourself time to gather your thoughts and prepare talking points.
- 2. Return calls quickly.** Reporters often work with short deadlines. If too busy to respond, quickly ask University and External Relations (UER) to respond on your behalf.
- 3. Ask questions.** Ask for the story focus, purpose of interview, when it will be published, is it for radio, tv, print, web, will it take place over the phone or in person, will it be live or pre-recorded, where will it occur, how long will it take?
- 4. But not for their questions.** Reporters will rarely provide a list of their questions – they want your responses to be natural and unrehearsed plus the freedom to go where the conversation might go. Likewise, they will not submit the article to you for review.
- 5. Context.** Be sure to understand the context of the interview. Are they seeking a 'hot take' to a breaking news story? A response to a contentious statement or action? Or seeking to provide deeper understanding to an ongoing story?
- 6. Right person?** Answers to the above questions may determine that you are unavailable when they need you or not the right person to comment in this instance. If so, let the reporter know and connect them with UER to find an appropriate expert.
- 7. Prepare.** Be sure to read any material the reporter is asking you to comment on or respond to. Write out up to three key points you want to make. UER can provide message box templates. Have simple facts and figures ready to support your points.
- 8. Use clear, concise, conversational language.** Avoid acronyms, technical terms and jargon. Use everyday language that the public can relate to. If you find yourself speaking in an unclear or rambling way, pause and then restate your point more succinctly and clearly.

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- 9. Practice.** If you have time, practice your talking points with a colleague or with UER. UER can compile potential questions.
- 10. Everything is on the record.** Anything you say can appear in the article or broadcast. Saying “off the record” does not make it so. Be precise in your words as this is the best control you have over what appears in print or on air.
- 11. Avoid hypotheticals or speaking on behalf of others.** It is tempting to speculate, but this is a fast track to a sensational headline. Respond with known facts and truth: *“I can’t speculate, however...”*, *“Without getting into guess work, what the research shows is...”*, *“Only they can speak to the reasons behind such a decision, but according to our research...”*
- 12. You have more control than you think.** You need not answer the question being asked, direct it back to one of your key points. The reporter is not your ultimate audience, the public is.
- 13. Visuals and support material.** Mention visual elements that may help the story. Provide any key background material you reference. UER can assist with this.
- 14. Mention details to UER** so we can track and share the media story.