

# Media Skills Guide for UTS Staff

## INTRODUCTION

Media promotion of the University's research, teaching and community service is crucial to building public awareness of the University's key strengths.

Positive and frequent media publicity about the research and activities of faculties, centres and institutes at UTS can help build a strong public profile for the University, encourage corporate and business support, increase prospective and current student interest and build pride within the University community.

At a personal level, research teams and individuals can receive public acknowledgement for the value of their work and contribute their views to public debate that touches on their areas of expertise. Several UTS staff already make regular public comment and their opinions are actively sought by the media.

This guide aims to assist you to deal with the media and make it easier for you to provide journalists with what they need to promote your achievements or your views.

The UTS media team manages the University's formal contact with the media. We will also provide you with any support and advice you need to bring good news about UTS to the public's attention.

The guide will help you work with the UTS media team and also independently liaise with journalists. You'll find contacts for the media team at the end.

## HOW THE UTS MEDIA TEAM CAN SUPPORT YOU

In brief – the UTS media team can provide the following:

- Assistance in developing media publicity strategies
- Assistance in developing media releases, briefing notes, letters to the editor and topical opinion pieces
- Advice on responding to issues of the day and which journalists to target
- Distributing material on your behalf to the media
- Coaching when undertaking interviews with journalists

## **MAKING THE MEDIA WORK FOR YOU AND YOUR INTERESTS**

It is an important first task to clearly define the messages you wish to communicate and who you want to receive them.

Newspapers, magazines and the electronic media have varying styles and needs. For example, a story that is perfect for a local newspaper may not interest a TV news editor. A newspaper events guide might need to get your information a couple of weeks in advance while the deadline for monthly publication will have an even greater lead time.

## **WHAT JOURNALISTS WANT**

According to Public Relations Institute of Australia surveys of journalists, "newsworthy" stories need to contain one or more of the following characteristics:

- **Impact** – size, money, consequence
- **Timeliness** – is it happening now?
- **Proximity** – is there a "local angle" (of particular relevance to local newspapers)?
- **Novelty** – Is it the first ever? Is it otherwise unusual?
- **Prominence** – Is there a famous name involved?
- **Human Interest** – how will events and issues affect people?
- **Currency** – does it reflect on current social issues and trends (the environment, health)?

Of course, there are other considerations, depending on the target media outlets.

TV needs a strong visual component to the story and people available to be interviewed on camera.

Radio needs someone for interview, either on air with a program host or be able to present quick sound "grabs" of comment in the news bulletin.

Newspapers usually need pictures. Major papers will usually take their own, but local papers will often welcome good quality contributions.

## **HOW TO HANDLE A DIRECT CALL FROM A JOURNALIST**

If a journalist calls you directly, respond as quickly as you can. Even if you are busy it is worth calling the journalist back and arranging another time to speak, or direct them to the media office.

Ask the journalist to explain the essence of the story they are reporting on and if you agree to be interviewed, ask the journalist his or her name, who they work for, and when they expect to publish or broadcast the interview.

At the end of the conversation ask for the journalist's phone number in case you need to ring back with extra information. If you are uncomfortable with a question you don't have to answer it, but avoid using the clichéd "no comment".

Most of the time you'll be taking questions on your area of expertise, but if you are asked to comment on university or faculty policy or university corporate issues that are outside your field of expertise simply decline and forward the person to the media office.

The media office is always the place to go if you need help dealing with a media inquiry or need additional advice.

## **HOW TO ATTRACT PUBLICITY FOR YOUR "STORY" OR SPECIAL EVENT**

Official UTS media releases are issued by the UTS media office, but if you wish, you are free to send information to journalists about a particular issue in your area of expertise or discipline.

If you do fax or send information to the media, let the media team know in case we receive an inquiry from a journalist based on what you've sent out.

Generally you will want a more planned, considered and strategic interaction with the media. In these circumstances the media team will prepare a media release about your research, teaching, event or newsworthy activity. The media team will also map out the best way to issue your media release

The following checklist will help you put together a brief for the media office. If you are not sure of all the details – we can help you fill in the gaps.

## **MEDIA STORY CHECKLIST**

### **Background to the story**

- What is the news in this story?
- Is this a timely news story – what key dates are associated?
- Is there only one story or a range of “angles” that could be taken?
- Could the story be treated as a feature story?
- Has this story been covered before?
- Is there related previous media coverage?
- Who are the sources to be quoted – both UTS and others?
- Are there any controversial issues associated with the story?
- Does this particular story tie in with other UTS matters or agendas?

### **Objectives of Media Coverage**

- What outcomes are sought through media coverage of the story?
- Does the media coverage complement other communication/promotional activities?

### **Target Audiences**

- Who needs to read about, see or hear about this story?
- Who could this news or announcement affect?

### **Key Messages**

- What are the most important messages or pieces of information that need to be communicated in the story?

### **Media Contact**

- Who is the most appropriate person the media should contact for further comment or clarification of details in the story?

## **MEDIA RELATIONS TOOLS**

Typically the media office issues three kinds of written statements, each with a different aim:

### **Media Alert**

The media alert is a brief statement of facts about an upcoming event, usually distributed to the media a few days before the event. Its purpose is to attract media to the event. Media alerts should specify the time and location of the event and make note of any visual opportunities for TV crews and press photographers. Alerts should be followed by a complete release on the day of the event.

### **Media Release**

A media release is ideally a one-page document containing newsworthy information intended for publication in the print or electronic media. The media release is conceived as a complete, but brief, news story that can be used without further reference to the source. A local newspaper might print the release as received, but larger publications and the electronic media will usually want further comment and/or interviews.

For the larger publications and specialist writers the media release works as a teaser to get them interested in the story. Having a strong visual element to the story will decide the issue as far as TV is concerned. It is important that people quoted in the release are available and prepared to respond to inquiries on the day it is issued.

In some cases they may receive a succession of calls from journalists, some wanting to record interviews over the phone. The media team will provide assistance and support in dealing with media inquiries, if it's needed.

### **Community Announcement**

The community announcement, like the media alert, gives advance warning of an upcoming event. Its principal goal is to have an event publicised in events diaries and guides and in the community news sections of newspapers.

## **HOW TO HAVE YOUR SAY IN THE MEDIA**

UTS is committed to contributing to comment and debate in the media on important issues of the day. UTS academics who take a part in public debate help establish the University's authority and expertise in areas of key strength. UTS academics can also become recognisable to the media and be regularly sought after for their opinions.

A traditional forum for debate has been the newspaper letters page, but opinion leaders also have the opportunity to have their views featured in the opinion pages of the major papers. These can be timely responses to current events or reflections on long-standing and unresolved issues. The media team will manage contact with opinion page editors, canvassing their interest, submitting a prepared item and following it through.

Also, if you wish to contribute your expertise to a breaking news story, the media team can issue a media alert at short notice. Such alerts are a brief statement/comment which is catchy, interesting and creates a sense of urgency. The alert may be issued to only a few key influential media outlets. If you are interviewed and quoted in those publications, other media coverage will often follow.

Alternatively you might yourself issue an "Important Information for the Media" notice, targeting a select group of media who might be interested in your area of expertise, your research or your event. This too should be catchy, brief, correctly dated and have contact numbers for more information.

Call the media team if you need assistance and don't forget to give us a copy of the material you send.

## **USEFUL TIPS FOR MEDIA INTERVIEWS – HOW TO GET YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS**

Media interviews are a powerful way for you to communicate important information to the community, your peers and your business partners.

To deal effectively with the media, it is important to remember that what you say will be for the public record, so be prepared and completely clear about what you want the audience to know about and remember. If you are unsure, contact the media team for advice and assistance.

### **Interviews for the News**

Media interviews will typically be for print, radio or television. In the case of news stories, only brief quotes or short, sharp sound/vision “grabs” may be required. In such cases it is important that you get your “key messages” across quickly and succinctly.

As a rule-of-thumb – develop just three or four key messages that can be reinforced and reiterated with ease.

Key messages may relate to a positive announcement – such as news of an exciting research breakthrough or a new course offering, or they could be your response to a serious issue/debate in the media.

In interviews dealing with controversy, journalists may try to draw you into commenting on issues or topics that will help them create a more exciting story and could leave you feeling on-the-spot or in-the-firing-line. Sticking to your four key messages will help you keep control of the interview and ensure your messages get reported, not what the reporter wants to write or broadcast.

### **Conversational Feature-Style Interviews**

At times you may be interviewed for magazine-style feature stories or for topical discussions on radio and television. Such interviews will generally seem more relaxed and conversational. Even at these times it is important to stay focused on your key messages and avoid being sidetracked by journalists who may want the interview to follow a particular agenda.

Without being stiff or robotic, find ways to draw the conversation back to your key messages and rephrase important points so listeners/readers clearly understand what YOU have to say.

### **Some extra hints and tips**

- Find out as much as you can about the story/interview the journalist is doing and be clear about the context your interview will fit within.

- Ask the journalist for their list of questions in advance, in some cases they will be willing to provide them – though not always and you should not expect them to.
- Write down your four key messages in a brief, clear format and practice sharing them with someone before the interview.
- Avoid the use of jargon or complicated words – phrase your responses to be understood by the audience viewing or listening to the interview.
- Be enthusiastic while also maintaining your composure.
- Do not rush to answer a question, take your time to consider the appropriate response and stop talking when the question is answered. Silence after you have finished your answer is OK and makes the journalist work harder to fill it – not you.

If an interview is centred on a controversy, it can be useful to have a “back-door” that can enable you to withdraw from the interview once you have had your say and forestall further difficult questions. For example – let interviewers know that you have only five minutes in which to answer their questions before you must attend another meeting. You might have a colleague standing by to keep track of the time and prompt the withdrawal.

## **DEALING WITH ISSUES AND CRISES**

Serious issues or events that could damage the University's reputation through negative media attention may seem to "come out of nowhere" and happen when least expected.

Classroom overcrowding, inappropriate downloading of material from the Internet by staff, or inadequate safety procedures or systems associated with campus facilities are examples of issues that could spark media interest.

*Crises* on the other hand might include a sudden accident causing severe loss of life, an act of terrorism or violence, or a serious case of negligence or failure in duty of care on the part of the University.

All staff at UTS have a role to play in helping to identify and possibly respond to issues and crises.

The success the University will have in responding to an issue or a crisis will depend on how quickly the facts of the situation are ascertained and how quickly appropriate information is given to the media and other stakeholders.

If you become aware of events or circumstances that you believe could be classed as an issue that would attract negative publicity, please contact your supervisor as soon as possible so they can notify your Dean or section head.

If you are uncertain or uncomfortable about speaking to your supervisor about a possible issue, you may also contact the media team for advice and we will assist you in handling your concern and in taking appropriate action.

In the case of a crisis or emergency, contact your supervisor immediately. If your supervisor is unavailable, it would be advisable to contact Security.

### **UTS MEDIA TEAM CONTACTS**

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