

Media Relations

The UW-Parkside public relations director is available to all departments and individuals to assist in the promotion of events and to help build stronger relationships with the media and the general public.

Public Information “Dos and Don’ts”

These public information guidelines apply to the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, a publicly assisted university. Publicly assisted means the public has a right to know what goes on at the university due to the financial support that the public provides. This would not necessarily apply to a private school or a business.

There is also information that despite public assistance is NOT public information. Information on personnel matters – disciplinary actions and the like – is not “public information.” Student records also are not public information and in many cases even parents are not allowed to have this information. A good rule to follow is that when you are in doubt about whether to release information, contact the University of Wisconsin-Parkside director of public relations.

First, here’s some advice on what to do if you want better relations with the media: treat people pleasantly and with respect. That’s not going to be the case with everyone but the vast majority of people will respond positively and you’ll have made a giant step toward better relations.

Here are some ideas on what to say and what NOT to say to members of the media:

- When the media does a good job let them know.
- Never say, “No comment.” If you're asked a question that you don't have an answer to, say you'll get back to the person who asked the question and then get back to them.
- After you are asked a question, you have the right to take time to consider your answer. Former NFL commissioner Pete Roselle used to say “That's a good question” then he would pause to give himself time to compose an answer.
- Never say, “Must be a slow news day if you're covering this story.” Reporter’s translation: My news judgment is under attack. No one responds well to sarcasm, no one enjoys being belittled or embarrassed.
- Never say, “I don't think that's any of your business.” You can and should refuse to answer questions of a personal nature or a request for information of the nature addressed above about personnel matters or student records. If it’s a question of public concern and there’s no legal constraints, answer the question to the best of your ability. Remember, though, you do have the right to take time to think before you answer the question.

Handling Negative Coverage

- In some instances, being proactive can help. If you know you have bad news and you know it’s going to become public information, contact the University of Wisconsin-Parkside director of public relations for proactive assistance. Being proactive may take some of the momentum away from negative information.
- Be honest. Be open. Be courteous. Give as much information as you can as pleasantly as you can.
- Never go “to the mattresses.” Don't adopt a siege mentality – an “us vs. them” attitude. That will hurt you immediately and in the long run.

- Remember – this, too, shall pass. Eventually a negative story will run out of steam.
- Important tip: Don't be caught in the “Silent Trap.” That’s where you’re asked a question, you answer, and then there’s silence ... and ... you ... feel obligated to say ... something, anything. Silence is the best response to silence.

Tips for Writing Media Releases

- Write it as you would a news story, but try to keep a positive perspective. If it’s not a positive event – the oil spill from the Exxon Valdez, for example – be as honest and up-front as possible. There are some events you cannot – and should not – try to communicate in a positive, happy manner. Recognize that everyone has a level of personal integrity where they at some point don't feel comfortable making a negative look positive.
- Write in the same concise, inverted pyramid-style used by reporters. Start with “who, what, where, when, why and how.” Then add a few quotes or further explanation. There are few things a reporter dislikes more than rewriting press releases.
- Make sure the basics of an event are covered, including the exact location, admission, time, and a phone number to call for more information. Reporters don't enjoy making a few calls to pick up basic information. And they don't have time to rummage around for a contact phone number. The wastebasket looks appealing to reporters faced with an incomplete press release.
- Keep it short. The truth is that the shorter the release is, the more likely it is to run in the morning paper. News hole – the space allotted for copy – is at a premium and press releases receive only a minimal amount of the space. That’s fine because most releases can accomplish what they need to in one double-spaced typed page.
- Learn to recognize when an event deserves more than a short press release. Some releases will warrant greater length. Some situations are very complex and need to be elaborated with quotes and statistics. Realize that many releases will be crafted into longer, bylined stories because of the newsworthiness of the situation.
- Recognize when a release isn't the only way to go. An informal note to editors or a photo memo explaining an event often will lead to a feature story more easily than a formal press release.
- Read and reread the publication you want to approach with a release. Learn the paper or magazine’s style and recognize the type of news it will accept. Half of the battle in public relations is understanding your market. At UW-Parkside, for instance, the e-newsletter *Communique* is a good place to promote a campus blood drive. But such an event wouldn't interest the majority of the local newspaper readers.
- Don't wear out your welcome. Working through the University of Wisconsin-Parkside director of public relations, approach the media with press releases only when you are offering what you feel is legitimate news that would interest general newspaper readers. Reporters are presented with stories every day from many sources, so be your own editor first before you send them everything.
- Remember that editors can do whatever they want with your release, short of adding inaccuracies. They have no responsibility to run them in full. They can change the lead. They can throw them away. Don't get upset if they use one release and disregard the next. There's an old adage in the newspaper business that says, “If you want to control the message, buy an ad.” On the other hand, you can't beat the free publicity you can get with a good press release.

Attracting Positive Coverage

- Look for ideas that might be news stories within your department. If your department is a good source of news, the department's credibility with the media rises.
- When you have a positive article written about you, send a thank-you note, a postcard will work.
- If a problem arises, something that involves the public, be proactive. Working with the University of Wisconsin-Parkside director of public relations, call and tell the media about the problem and what's being done to correct it. If you don't call, someone from the public will, and then you're on the defensive.

Other Tips

- Always work through the University of Wisconsin-Parkside director of public relations.
- Working with the University of Wisconsin-Parkside director of public relations, make your expertise known and make it available. Assist the director of public relations in sending the media a list of things your department does and encourage them to call if they have questions that people in your department can answer.
- If you read an article, see or hear a national story and you can think of a local angle, call the University of Wisconsin-Parkside director of public relations and discuss presenting the story idea to the media.
- With the help of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside director of public relations, send out news releases. Everyone else does so why not you? However, don't expect every release to get the attention of the media or to gain you coverage. Yours is one of hundreds a media outlet might receive.