

Media Relations Policy – Background

Purpose: To create an aligned, consistent approach to engagement with news media for administrators, faculty, and staff

Overview: Last updated in 2015, the current media relations policy does not address the media needs of a flagship university in today's media landscape. This policy has been updated in order to detail the university's process and approach to facilitating media inquiries, defining a clear process for faculty and staff interaction with members of the media, and disseminating news releases to external audiences. The new policy, which was also shaped by a review of similar policies at a dozen peer institutions, outlines the university's desire for faculty to speak with members of the media regarding their research, scholarship and/or professional expertise, while also providing helpful guidelines for those who don't interact with media on a regular basis and might want assistance or training before conducting an interview.

Media Relations and Communications Policy

Summary/Purpose: In order to enhance the University of Mississippi's image, brand and reputation, this policy creates an aligned, consistent approach to engagement with the news media for administrators, faculty and staff across campus to produce clear communications that are strongly connected to institutional strategic priorities.

University Marketing and Communications is the designated contact point for the news media and is the source of official information about the university. This policy was established to detail the university's process and approach to facilitating media inquiries, defining a clear process for faculty and staff interaction with members of the media, and disseminating news releases to external audiences.

MEDIA INQUIRIES AND STATEMENTS

Media inquiries for official responses/statements/opinions

Inquiries for **official** university response, statement or opinion to any matter must be referred to University Marketing and Communications (UM&C). Administrators, faculty and staff (UM personnel) may not offer the university's **official** response, statement or opinion, unless express authorization has been provided by UM&C in coordination with the Office of the Chancellor. The Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, or his/her designee(s), serves as the official spokesperson for the university and will deliver all official university response messages to members of the media on behalf of the institution.

Incidents, or sensitive or emergency issues

Incidents or newsworthy items of significance, including those that may lead to negative perception or publicity for the institution or a specific college, department or other area, should be conveyed to UM&C as soon as possible to gather facts, draft and review the university's response as warranted, and ensure that the university's position is presented accurately in media coverage. Embargoes can be established or confidentiality assured for sensitive topics, or when external partners are involved and require such agreements. UM personnel may not issue official statements separately to members of the media without coordinating with UM&C.

When an issue arises that could affect public safety or the university's reputation, UM&C personnel will work with leaders across the university to assist with crafting and distributing messages to internal partners, such as emergency management and public safety officials and Senior Leadership Group members, and external audiences, such as members of the media and public. In the event a crisis or negative incident primarily impacts one college, school or area, UM&C will work with the dean, administrator or other UM personnel on response and resolution.

INTERACTING WITH MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES

Faculty responses to media

Faculty members are encouraged to speak with members of the media regarding their research, scholarship and/or professional expertise. In such cases, they are not required to seek advance approval. Upon request, UM&C can provide assistance or guidance regarding interview preparation to help communicate your expertise clearly to members of the media for consumption by a general audience. During media interviews, faculty and UM personnel must clearly state their role and affiliation with the university for proper attribution.

Faculty members are encouraged to notify deans, department chairs/heads and UM&C when discussions with a member of the media have occurred so UM&C can track the resulting media coverage, share that coverage with the university community as appropriate, and/or enhance the visibility and opportunity for media promotion.

In speaking or acting as private persons, personal opinions should be clearly and carefully identified as such. UM personnel may not offer the university's **official** response, statement or opinion, unless express authorization has been provided by UM&C in coordination with the Office of the Chancellor. As outlined in the prior section, **official** responses on university matters must come from UM&C. If asked for an official university response, faculty or staff can direct members of the media to UM&C.

Media on campus

The University of Mississippi welcomes representatives of the news media to campus. Journalists who plan to visit should notify UM&C to ensure the appropriate assistance with sources, logistics and access to locations.

As a public institution, UM is an open campus that provides the media with reasonable access to outdoor and indoor spaces. However, the university may regulate media access so as not to disrupt teaching or research, to protect the health and safety of students and staff, to protect the privacy of students and others who live on campus, and to comply with state and federal laws on student and personnel data.

While on university property, members of the media should be accompanied by a UM&C staff member or a designee(s) appointed by UM&C. UM personnel who are contacted about a member of the media coming to campus in advance should notify UM&C as soon as possible or notify UM&C if a member of the media arrives unannounced on campus by emailing umpr@olemiss.edu. If aware of media interviews and upcoming stories in advance, UM&C can help amplify media coverage beyond readership of one specific publication and share with a broader audience both internal and external.

Requests to gain access to non-public areas of the university, such as residence halls and secured research facilities, must be submitted 5 working days in advance and will be evaluated prior to approval. If the request is approved, members of the media must be accompanied into these non-public areas by a UM&C staff member or a designee(s) appointed by UM&C.

Media training

UM&C offers media training to administrators, faculty and staff interested in learning more about interacting with members of the media effectively. UM&C can coordinate and host media training seminars for large groups or schedule individual sessions for members of the campus community.

DISSEMINATION OF NEWS

News releases

All university news and media advisories* (electronic or print) must flow through and be approved by UM&C prior to publication and distribution to media outlets. UM&C will review and/or edit these items for appropriate news, newsworthiness and/or editorial/design standards and work with specific departments, colleges and other areas on revisions or concerns. UM personnel may not send information (including formal and informal efforts to place stories in media outlets) or releases separately to media (except for academic journals and research/niche publications) without coordinating with UM&C. UM&C will work with UM personnel to tailor media distribution for maximum exposure among local, state and national outlets through its distribution platforms. A member of the UM&C staff will respond to an email (sent to umpr@olemiss.edu) requesting these media outreach services within **1 business day** in order to allow for items to be communicated and distributed in a timely fashion.

In addition to UM&C editing workflows, news releases might require additional approvals, such as those that involve the following areas:

- **Research news:** Any university news releases involving research, external funding or other intellectual property must be approved by the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs.
- **Legislative/federal funding news:** Any release or news item containing information of import for legislators (state and federal) must be approved by the university's government relations team.

College/school/departmental content

Articles, stories, blogs or other posts originating from within a specific college, school or department on campus should flow through UM&C for review prior to publication on a university website managed by an individual department or center. While not required, this approach allows for aligned and consistent messaging with off-campus or external audiences, as well as an opportunity for broader and aligned messaging across campus if needed. UM&C will periodically review web content, publications and other products to ensure alignment.

** University news and media advisories, also referred to as news or press release, means a communication directed at or distributed to local, national or international media outlets for the intended purpose of announcing or sharing noteworthy matters pertaining to the university and encouraging media coverage of the matter described in the advisory. These items may be written, recorded or spoken through electronic or print mediums.*

Media relations and communications activities for Athletics is managed through its sports information office and for the University of Mississippi Medical Center through its Office of Public Affairs at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

DRAFT

Media Relations and Communications Guidelines

Interacting with media representatives

When contacted by a member of the media, University of Mississippi personnel should consider the following questions before agreeing to an interview for publication:

- Do I have all the relevant and up-to-date information on this particular topic?
- Do I know what all the key messages are for this particular topic?
- Am I the appropriate spokesperson or topic expert for this particular topic?
- Will I feel comfortable when my name is used by the media in print, online or broadcast as the person speaking for the department on this particular topic?
- Have I worked with University Marketing & Communications staff in the past to learn about the best techniques for conducting an interview with members of the media?

If the answer is NO to any of the above questions, politely decline the interview and tell the reporter that someone will get back to them shortly. Then, contact UM&C as soon as possible with the name, phone number or email address of the reporter, the nature of their inquiry and their deadline. UM&C staff might come back to you as the person who should conduct the interview, but training and support can be provided beforehand to ensure consistent and aligned messaging.

If you answer YES to all of the questions, feel free to proceed with the interview, remembering to answer only questions for which you are the spokesperson or topic expert. If the interview strays from the original topic, inform the reporter you will find someone else better suited to answer those particular questions. As soon as possible after the interview, university personnel should contact UM&C with the following information:

- Media outlet and reporter
- Topic of interview
- General summary of interview (what questions were asked and how you answered them)
- When the story will run/air

UM&C information

UM&C asks that all media inquiries be sent to umpr@olemiss.edu for review. This inbox is monitored by multiple members of the UM&C staff and ensures the quickest response. Phone calls can be directed to UM&C's main office at 662-915-7066.