When a reporter calls

Contact University Relations (UR) if you are contacted by the media. UR coordinates all university media activity. Check out the media relations resources on the UR site, www.uni.edu/ur (under public relations).

- It’s perfectly acceptable to tell the reporter you need a little time to prepare, then return the call as soon as possible.
- Get the reporter’s name, media outlet, phone number, email address, topic and deadline.
- Return the call as soon as possible.

Preparation

UR is available for media training. Call 3-6728 to schedule an appointment.

- Write down likely questions and appropriate answers.
- Know the points you wish to make. Develop appropriate messages. (See UR’s website for Message Development Worksheet.)
- Ask yourself what is the main point you want to get across?
- Practice responses out loud.

The interview

- Be yourself.
- Tell the truth.
- Show passion, empathy and sincerity about the topic.
Answer the question, move on to important points you want to make and offer a supporting point to strengthen your message.

Remember, you become the message.

“No comment” is never an appropriate response. If you can’t comment, explain why (litigation, confidential, etc.)

There is no such thing as “off the record.”

Make your points at the beginning. Repeat them at the end.

Less is more.

Use quotable quotes - be illustrative and pithy.

Use flagging statements - “the point I’d like to make...”

Be a storyteller.

Avoid jargon. Speak so the lay person can understand.

Always support your point with facts, statistics or personal experience.

Don’t repeat negative language or inaccurate information.

Don’t answer hypothetical questions.

If you don’t know the answer, say so and find someone who does.

Interviews are short. You only get a few minutes to share your expertise.

Don’t ask to approve the story before it’s published or broadcast.

If a reporter ambushes you with a hostile interview or unexpected line of questioning, refer back to the original topic. “I’m prepared for topic A, not topic B at this time.”

Consider the two questions you don’t want to be asked - then think about how you will answer them.

The television interview

Darker clothes look best.

When interviewing outdoors, don’t wear sunglasses.

Look directly at the reporter, not at the camera.

Mind your facial expressions; smile and nod at only the appropriate moments.

Be natural. Don’t fidget or swivel in your chair.

Don’t use hand gestures.

Don’t chew gum.

Silence is better than “ummm.”