

Contacts with the News Media

WHEN A REPORTER CALLS

Contact University Relations - Mike Emery, Director of Communications, promptly at 713-221-5806/281-794-4824 (cell) if you are called, emailed or approached by a reporter, photographer, videographer or other representative of the news media regarding:

- An official university matter;
- A matter of institutional policy;
- Information about a particular student, professor or staff member;
- Your expert opinion on a current local or national story;
- An expert quote needed for an upcoming story or article; or
- Any “official” university response to an ongoing issue.

While speaking with the reporter, get his/her name, affiliation and phone number before informing University Relations of the request.

The following individuals will immediately respond to the reporter to provide him/her with requested information or facilitate an interview with the appropriate faculty or staff member:

- Director of Media Relations
- Executive Director of University Relations
- Vice President for Advancement and University Relations

In addition to scheduling a media interview, University Relations can:

- Provide you with media training prior to an interview;
- Determine the particular angle the reporter is interested in covering;
- Determine the date of broadcast/publication; and
- Track any resulting placements in publications or on news broadcasts.

Contacts with the News Media

WHEN YOU SEE A NEWS REPORTER OR PHOTOGRAPHER ON CAMPUS

If you observe a news reporter or photographer on campus, immediately notify University Relations. UHD is a public facility and news media have access to our campus, but students also have a right to privacy. University Relations will work with news organizations to balance the two. While many news organizations let us know in advance when they are coming to campus, others might simply stop by to get the perspective of college students, faculty or staff members.

NEWS RELEASE DISTRIBUTION

Faculty, staff and students should submit ideas with potential for attracting media attention to University Relations **at least three weeks prior** to scheduled events and activities. In order to provide news outlets with ample time to either attend the event or cover the activity afterward, University Relations must receive notice well in advance of planned gatherings.

ONLY University Relations is authorized to distribute external communications with the official UHD logo. This logo designates that the document is an official University-approved message. While other entities, such as the Student Government Association, may distribute news releases, the author/organization disseminating the information must be clearly evident to news media.

University Relations uses a comprehensive list of local, statewide and national TV/radio and print media outlets and reporters, categorized by the “beats” they cover. As this office also has established relationships with individual reporters, working through University Relations in press release dissemination will produce the widest publicity for an event, program, etc.

Contacts with the News Media

WHEN A REPORTER CALLS ABOUT YOUR AREA OF EXPERTISE

If you are contacted or approached by a reporter who wants information from your field of study or expertise, University Relations encourages you to consider agreeing to the interview. Participation with these requests allows us to give back to the community and provides the University with free public exposure in the newspaper, on TV and radio, and in various other news outlets. You can help strengthen UHD's brand when you tell your story. However, University Relations should answer all questions about policies, university-wide activities, crisis situations, and other general inquiries.

As previously stated, please gather pertinent details from the reporter, then contact University Relations at 713-221-5806 prior to participating in any media interview.

In addition to responding to individual reporters' questions, you can also work with University Relations to initiate potential news stories. If you are an expert in an area that is making headlines, please call University Relations to determine if media may be interested in including your local expertise in the story. For example, if your academic expertise includes presidential politics, we can ensure that local reporters have your name and contact information prior to a local presidential primary.

Please always ensure that the reporter knows you are affiliated with the University of Houston-Downtown, and not the University of Houston.

BEFORE AN INTERVIEW

The Office of University Relations can provide you with training prior to a media interview, inform you about what to expect and offer individual coaching based on the interview topic. If you would like to schedule this training, please contact University Relations at 713-221-5806.

Contacts with the News Media

GENERAL TIPS FOR MEDIA INTERVIEWS

- ALWAYS KEEP IT POSITIVE.
- Keep student confidentiality uppermost at all times.
- Explain your title and role at UHD.
- Tell the reporter that University policy requires that you refer all media inquiries to University Relations staff who will respond directly.
- Never answer a reporter question with, “No comment.” In nearly every case this phrase implies guilt.
- It is always acceptable to tell the reporter that you don’t know the answer to a question. When possible, refer him/her to the appropriate UHD expert.
- Remember that each time you speak in public, you could be speaking to a reporter.
- Each time you respond to a reporter’s questions, you become a newsmaker.
- Always answer reporter questions honestly and accurately, without assuming. When in doubt about an answer, contact University Relations to discuss possible answers.
- Stop and think about your answer before you respond. Understand your agenda, and stick to it. You’re the expert on your issue; the reporter is learning.
- If you’re being interviewed over the phone and need time to think, tell the reporter that you need a few minutes to gather some information. Focus on a maximum of three key messages that you’d like to get across. Then call the reporter back as quickly as possible.
- Never go “off the record.” As long as you are on the phone with a reporter or in person with a reporter, you are “on the record” (even after the interview has concluded).
- Refrain from giving your personal opinions. Remember that when you speak to a reporter, you’re representing the University, its policies and reputation.
- During an in-person interview on campus, look at the reporter and NOT at the camera. Try to pretend the camera is not present.
- Do your homework prior to an interview. Know the issue and your data/research before answering reporters’ questions.
- Try to relax, as you are the expert in your field. The reporter and readers/viewers likely have very little knowledge about the topic.
- Keep it simple. Use uncomplicated language and layman’s terms.

Contacts with the News Media

Question: I am employed in the Financial Aid Office at UHD. A local newspaper reporter called and asked me to comment on how our students are reacting to the latest federal regulation requiring payback of student loans. Can I answer the reporter's questions?

Answer: University Relations, at 713-221-5806, should answer the reporter's questions

Question: I am a faculty member with expertise on educational policy and curriculum. A news program has called and asked for my opinion on the impact of new education legislation on pedagogical strategies. Can I respond to the news program?

Answer: Contact University Relations at 713-221-5806 to review the item prior to speaking to the reporter.