Media Protocol
(Updated February 2018)

PURPOSE
Engaging the news media poses both benefits and challenges. The benefits are clear when information and feature stories are disseminated to a wider audience at no cost. The challenges are also clear. A free press cannot be contained in its inquiry or reporting. This media protocol will establish parameters of interaction with the news media to increase positive press and minimize negative press. It will also help to ensure that we:

- strategically coordinate communication
- deliver cohesive, timely and thoughtful messages across the division
- properly inform TAMU and division leadership

Follow these steps when a reporter or TAMU MarComm staff member contacts DSA staff directly to request information or an interview:

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<tr>
<th>Gather Information</th>
<th>Routine Inquiries</th>
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<td>• If approached for an interview, notify DSA MarComm staff and your supervisor.</td>
<td>If the inquiry does not involve a sensitive issue: Call, text, or send an email with the information above to both your direct supervisor, the person who manages marketing and communication in your department (if applicable), and the DSA marketing and communications director. Sondra White 979-458-3296 (office) or 979-574-3111 (mobile) <a href="mailto:sondra@tamu.edu">sondra@tamu.edu</a></td>
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<td>• Key info to collect:</td>
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<td>- Name, title, and contact information of the reporter</td>
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<td>- The name of the media outlet.</td>
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<td>- Story details, including:</td>
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<td>• What specific questions do they need answered?</td>
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<td>• Who would they like to interview for the story? (students, faculty, administrators, staff)</td>
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<td>• What is the story content? What do you believe is newsworthy?</td>
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<td>- Who is the intended audience of the story?</td>
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<td>• For example, some publications target a specific audience, such as higher education professionals (Chronicle of Higher Education), students (The Battalion), or the TAMU community (TAMU Today).</td>
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<td>- What is the deadline?</td>
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<td>• What is the anticipated time of release of information in print or broadcast? (Broadcast media are typically on a daily deadline, while newspapers and other journals may have several days to complete an assignment.)</td>
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<td>- Buy yourself time to think. Tell the reporter or TAMU MarComm staff member that someone from the division will call them back once we have had time to discuss the request.</td>
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• Supervisors and / or DSA marketing and communication managers should inform their department director about the media inquiry, and department directors should inform the associate vice president (AVP) who manages that department.

• It is important to coordinate with DSA marketing and communications director who logs all interviews and can help research answers, schedule interview and prep

Sensitive Topics

• If the query is considered sensitive or may adversely affect the reputation of our division, one of our departments, or Texas A&M University, DSA leadership will advise the TAMU chief marketing and communications officer, whose office may assist in providing a draft response if the query may have wider sensitivity.

• It is vital that we are fully compliant with the law and the protection of sensitive information related to our students. This includes code of conduct issues and crises. Only the VPSA, Director of Communications, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer are permitted to address these issues subject to legal review.

• If a media inquiry involves a Title IX topic (sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, or sexual assault and violence), DSA leadership will refer the reporter to the TAMU Title IX coordinator and inform the appropriate supervisors/department directors/AVPs so they are aware of the request.

Jennifer M. Smith
TAMU Title IX Coordinator
979-845-0977
TitleIX.Coordinator@tamu.edu
https://urc.tamu.edu/title-ix/

• If a media inquiry involves an active criminal case or incident, DSA leadership will refer the reporter to the TAMU Police Department: 979-845-2345

Respond

• The AVP, director, DSA MarComm professional, key supervisor, and / or marketing and communications director will collaborate to determine who is best qualified to answer the reporter or TAMU MarComm staff member, as well as when and how that communication will take place.

• Depending on the situation, any of the following people may be asked to respond to an inquiry: TAMU senior VP / chief marketing and communications officer;
  - TAMU AVP marketing and communications
  - An appropriate TAMU administrator
  - DSA vice president
  - A DSA associate vice president
  - A DSA department director
  - DSA marketing and communications director
  - A DSA staff member
  - A TAMU student
- **Decide What to Say.**
  
  Every interview is an opportunity to tell your story. Jot down three key things you want to get across in the interview. Keep them simple and jargon-free. Metaphors, analogies, anecdotes, and specific facts can make your messages stronger.

**During the Interview**

- Don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know.”
- Remember that an interview is a two-way street. Answer questions, but take the opportunity to offer the reporter relevant information. Remember that you can’t tell a reporter what story to write.
- Consider everything “on the record.” Do not offer any information that you wouldn’t want to see in print or on the evening news.
- Never say “no comment.” There are better ways to put it.

**After the Interview**

- Don’t ask to see the story before it is printed or aired. If they have time, most reporters will agree to read direct quotes back to you and fact-check numbers before publishing their story.
- Invite the reporter to call you back if they need points clarified. Extending this courtesy is the best way to ensure accuracy.
- It’s OK to ask when a story will be published. Let the DSA MarComm team know so we can look out for it!

**Close the Loop**

- Notify the DSA staff member who took the original call to keep them in the loop, even if they will not be the person to respond directly to the media.

**Resources**

- See More Tips for Communicating with the Media (below)

- For in-person interviews, DSA MarComm staff can assist by:
  
  - Identifying background/theme/angle of the story and other interviewee(s)
  - Assisting with time and place with interviewee(s) and reporter
  - Identify talking points, discuss any likely negatives, and brainstorm
  - Attending the interview, if warranted

**Recordkeeping**

- DSA MarComm staff will track all division media and TAMU MarComm inquiries.
  - Archive a digital screen shot of the story after publication.

- DSA department staff should also track all media inquiries and press interactions (including those involving TAMU MarComm) on their local servers.
  - Archive a digital screen shot of the story after publication.
MORE TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA

All administrators, faculty, staff and students are representatives of Texas A&M University. When reporters call for information or interviews, each and every employee and student should understand how to communicate effectively and represent the institution to the best of his/her ability.

• Be familiar with and follow the DSA Marketing & Communications media protocols to ensure a timely, coordinated, and meaningful response.

• Write down what you want to say before speaking with the reporter. State your purpose clearly, keep it short, and try to avoid lengthy conversation. Avoid acronyms and technical terms.

• Remember that you are representing Texas A&M University and our division. Avoid giving your personal opinion.

• Never lie.

• Repeat important points you wish to make.

• Be pleasant, but cautious. Do not be flippant or joke around. State your point in simple, positive words and tone. Keep in mind that anything you say or include in an email may be used in the story.

• Know your facts. Discuss only subjects that fit into the area of your expertise. If you are not sure about something, it is perfectly fine to tell the reporter you do not know and can research it and circle back.

• Don’t assume that you are the only one that the reporter is talking to about a story, especially if it is controversial.

• Do not invoke politics.

• Approach every media inquiry as an opportunity to spread the word about Texas A&M University, our division, and the good work we are doing for Texas A&M students. Be courteous and professional, and keep in mind that reporters are simply doing their jobs by reporting the news. They are calling you because they want your views for their story. The vast majority are not "out to get you." Hostility from reporters comes when they feel you are not being helpful.

• A member of communications team may staff, or attend, the interview which can help to keep the interview timely, to take notes to circle back to reporter for questions that cannot be answered.

• The TAMU MarComm team is tasked with covering university news and public / media relations. Oftentimes this will involve our division. We are a collaborative team. Consider their information requests a priority and do your best to respond promptly.

• Reporters are often working on short deadlines. DSA Communications can assist in responding within a day, even if the response is that we are unable to offer comment at this time.

• Be mindful of your social media channels. You are strongly encouraged to set privacy settings.