

# Virginia Tech Media Relations

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- Media Training
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# Media Training Workshop

- This is not about how to deal with controversial university topics.
- It's about opportunities for you to:
  - Provide some context to news of the day; your expertise.
  - Explain cutting edge research.
  - Talk about or promote a campus event.
  - Explain a campus initiative.

# Virginia Tech Media Relations

- Tip sheets and media advisories
- Daily media requests
- Track Virginia Tech in the news
- Operate broadcast studio
- Media training and interview prep



# Interviews can feel intimidating

- Fear of coming across in an unfavorable light
- Speaking into cameras and microphones can make you nervous
- Mistrust of the press
- Lack of prep time
- Fear of the difficult question



# Why do a media interview?

- Our land-grant mission: Knowledge generated by Virginia Tech will be made accessible through various delivery systems for the benefit of society
- It's an opportunity to deliver a consistent and coherent message that rises above the noise
- The opportunity to reach legislative decision makers, funding agencies and potential donors

# Interview Preparation

- You know your subject matter better than anyone
- Determine your 2-3 key talking points
- Never go in unprepared – practice, practice!
- Be concise and to the point; repeat your key points
- Be positive, be confident

# Your message, told simply

- Think about your next-door-neighbor
- Tell your story in conversational, enthusiastic tones
- When possible, avoid scientific terminology



# Anticipate the Questions

- What would you ask?
- 90% of the questions can be predicted, before the interview
- Consider the tough question





# Consider your audience

- Who's listening, watching, reading?
- What will the audience want to know?
- Consider:
  - Prospective Donors
  - Prospective Students
  - Prospective Faculty & Staff
  - Colleagues in higher ed



# Basic Questions Will Guide Your Through

- Why is this important?
- Who will be most interested in learning about this?
- Why do people need to know this?
- How much urgency is there to this message?
- Where can people go for more information?

# What kind of interview is this?

- Email
- In-person
- Phone
- Radio
- Video / Television

# Interview by Email

- The opportunity to reflect and edit.
- No chance you'll be misquoted.
- Can have others review your answers before submitting.



# Interview in Person

- Avoid noisy locations.
- Make it conversational, try to avoid technical language.
- Be careful not to become too "chatty."
- Assume the interview is never over.



# Interview by phone

- Avoid interviewing after a cold call.
- All of your notes and background material right in front of you.
- Find a quiet place.
- Use a landline when possible.



# Interview on Radio

- Make sure you can hear questions clearly.
- If you are even slightly uncomfortable with the volume or connection, say so.
- Use your voice to show excitement over ideas that excite you.
- Sit close to the microphone (in studio) - no farther than a "fist's-length" away.



# Interview on Camera

- Determine where to make eye contact
- Be certain you know: Is it live or recorded?
- Know clearly when the camera is recording and when the camera is off.
- Think about visuals – discuss in advance.







# Top Ten: Trickiest Questions



- Hypothetical or “what if....?”
- Yes or No?
- Third Party or Unknown Source?
- Wouldn't you agree?
- Ranking or Choice?

# Top Ten: Trickiest Questions

- Negative Premise?
- Personal Opinion
- Personal Attack or Cheap Shot?
- False Facts
- Is there anything else....?

# Advice from the Pros

- Be comfortable. Arrive early and get seated wherever the interview is to take place at least a few minutes ahead of time.
- Be prepared. Ask the reporter before the interview begins about the sorts of questions he or she will be asking.
- Know whether you are live or recorded. If an interview is not live on the TV or radio, you can stop and rephrase anything that doesn't come out right. Simply stop and restart your answer.

# Advice from the Pros

- Try to begin an answer to a question with a restatement or reworking of the question. For instance, “Why do you think a recession may be coming?” Your response: “The main reason many economists are saying a recession may be coming is.....”
- It really hurts an interview when the expert forgets the audience. Remember that the person receiving the information is not an expert. It’s very easy to talk over someone’s head.

# Advice from the Pros

- If it's someone's first time on camera, they usually think their answers have to be perfect - totally not the case. Interviews I conduct are more like back and forth conversations. A lot of the times, some of the best sound bites I find are when we're just casually chatting.
- Remember that TV requires visuals. The reporter will want to know what video he/she can acquire to help tell the story. If you've thought of that in advance, it will help the reporter produce a compelling piece.

# Advice from the Pros

- Be prompt. I work at a fast pace. I have tight deadlines and I have to get stuff done.
- If I'm on a tight deadline and I reach out to three or four faculty members for a story and one calls me back first, that person will likely have the strongest voice in my story simply out of necessity.
- Reporters love scoops. I love any story that hasn't been told by another reporter or on social media. I want to tell people something new whenever I can.

# Pet Peeves

- People who put out news releases inviting coverage and then aren't available for an interview the same day.
- Events where all of the participants aren't cleared to be on TV.
- Try not to refer to a script or notes on a piece of paper. Some people are concerned they will misspeak or forget an important detail if it isn't written down, but the bobbing head interview is distracting. And it usually comes off feeling canned, and not spontaneous.

# Appearance Suggestions

- Hair out of face
- Solid colors, avoid patterns
- Avoid green (usually in studio)
- Wear fitting, comfortable, professional clothing
- Simple jewelry
- Avoid anything distracting
- Minimal make-up
- Consider current Virginia Tech branded attire



**What if you really don't  
know the answer?**



# Summary

- Determine your 2-3 key talking points
- Never go in unprepared – practice, practice!
- Prepare for the tough question
- When possible, avoid scientific terminology
- Know the format – know your audience

# Summary

- Never say “no comment.”
- Avoid speaking “off the record.”
- Try to understand the reporter’s deadline and do your best to respond quickly.
- The Final Question: Is there anything you’d like to mention we haven’t talked about?

# Summary

- Find a way to work “Virginia Tech” into your answer
  - “Our research at Virginia Tech tells us.....”
  - “At Virginia Tech, we’re all about Hokie Wellness....”
  - “Virginia Tech is hosting an amazing event this weekend on the Drillfield...”

# Media Interviews: Q&A

