MEDIA RELATIONS 101

At McMaster University, we regard Media Relations as a bridge from the University to the world beyond. Those of us who work in the Office of Public Relations make it our job to collect stories from all over campus and consider the best way for those stories to reach the public.

How we communicate McMaster’s stories beyond our campus
Each day, reporters and producers from around the world—in 2008 we logged more than 1,700 such calls—contact McMaster’s Media Relations department seeking experts on a variety of topics: from major news stories on the economy to the political scene in Canada and abroad to the latest StatsCan study or latest social trend. Reporters also consult McMaster’s Media Guide to find sources for their stories. You can add your profile to the Experts Guide at http://experts.mcmaster.ca/.

Likewise, those of us who work in Media Relations regularly communicate with local, national and international reporters via media advisories, news releases, experts advisories, the Daily News (http://dailynews.mcmaster.ca/), our Media Guide (http://experts.mcmaster.ca/), our web site (www.mcmaster.ca/ua/opr/nms/), and the American Association for the Advancement of Science’s news service EurekAlert.

When a Reporter Calls
When someone from the media calls you for an interview there are a few things you should find out before you agree to the interview: the reason for the call; whether the interview is over the phone, by email, or involves a camera crew; whether you are being interviewed as a quotable source or as background information; the reporter’s deadline. Such information will allow you to decide how much of your time you will need to devote to the interview.

We also ask that you call us in Media Relations. It will allow us to track the story, and make us aware of what newspapers or TV stations are working on the story so we can offer them visuals to accompany the story, or give them access to labs, etc. In the case of a TV crew, we can assist in directing them to the most convenient place on campus to unload/transport their gear.

Be advised that journalism is a deadline-driven business. You may receive a request for an interview from a reporter at 3 p.m. who needs to file their story by 5 p.m. A reporter’s deadline does not conform to the academic schedule, and sometimes reporters forget that professors and researchers also teach classes. If you know you cannot do the interview, please let the reporter know as soon as you can.
**How a newsroom works**

Every morning, journalists hold story meetings to decide the stories they will write about or broadcast that day. They will also decide how to cover those stories.

With the key stories decided, reporters are assigned to specific stories. Often, reporters have no specific expertise on what they are covering. Reporters rarely have regular “beats” anymore, rather they are all considered “general reporters”, meaning that they are required to cover everything from city politics to business to social issues to the environment to transportation. Don’t be surprised if a reporter asks you fairly basic questions: more often than not s/he is trying to gather background information and understand your research. Similarly, a reporter might be seeking your comment on an issue happening to another organization, or they might call to ask about an issue happening at your organization. They might even call you and ask: “Have you got any good stories happening there?”

Despite your patience and co-operation, your interview might never see the light of day. News priorities change constantly, and the story you were being interviewed for might be shelved because the reporter was suddenly asked by his/her editor to handle a breaking story. Reporters feel just as frustrated by the lack of time and/or space allotted to their stories.

If you want tips specific to the type of interview you are doing please click on 'Print Interview, TV Interview' or 'Radio Interview'.

**Errors and Misquotes**

Nothing is more annoying than discovering that a reporter has misquoted you or inserted an error in the story. This might not be the reporter’s fault; stories go through an editing process that stretches into the evening with another set of editors and they may misinterpret the content of a story or unknowingly eliminate a contextual statement or fact. Your recourse is rarely satisfying. Newspaper corrections appear on Page 2 in the next day’s paper in a small box in a corner of the page. One option to correct the error is to consider writing a Letter to the Editor or writing an Op Ed piece that more correctly explains your research or point of view.