Dealing with the Media

How to respond to a reporter’s request for information or an interview…
Why the Media Matters

- Outreach is a positive—and a University goal
- The more your research/work is in the media, the more people will know about you, the College of Engineering and its programs
- Increased awareness can mean more funding
Problems Between Academia and the Media

- **Lack of Understanding**
  - Faculty use too much scientific jargon
  - Reporters don’t understand the subject matter

- **Distrust on both sides**
  - Media “never gets it right”
  - Professors are arrogant and erudite
When will a Reporter Call?

- To follow up a news release
- To find a local angle to a national story
- For info on a major research breakthrough
- To report on major award or grant
- On a slow news day
- To cover a crisis
Things to Remember About the Media

- Deadlines are very important to reporters
  - Return calls asap
- Reporters consider you the expert
- Be positive and upbeat
  - Avoid appearing like you don’t have time for them
- Build a positive rapport with a reporter
  - They’ll call you the next time they need information or a quote
- News is reported on 8th-grade level—avoid jargon
The Purpose of an Interview

If you agree to an interview:

- Know the message you want to communicate
- Plan answers to possible questions, both positive and negative
- Use Media to communicate your message to broader audience
What to Do if a Reporter Calls

- Start with most important points
- Answer only the questions asked
- Keep messages simple
- Keep sentences short—sound bites
What to Do if a Reporter Calls

- View as an opportunity, not an ordeal
- Plan what you want to say
- Remember: Reporters are looking for controversy, conflict, confrontation
What NOT to Do if a Reporter Calls

- Never say “No comment”
- Avoid rambling
  - Reporters will use silence to get you to talk
  - Stop once you’ve provided the answer
- Don’t try to be funny or glib
- Never comment on issues not in your area of expertise—and never mislead a reporter
How to Direct the Questioning

- Use “bridging language” to guide and get the reporter on track:
  - “The question should be…”
  - “What’s more important is…”
  - “Another way to think about it is…”
  - “The facts are…”
How to Close the Interview

- Reiterate the most important points:
  - “We’ve talked about several things today; here’s what you need remember…”
  - “I believe the most critical point is…”
  - “Your readers will want to know…”
Print vs. Broadcast

- TV reporters want video—on-camera interview or film of students—and they want it now!
- Radio reporters want audio—by phone or in person
- Print reporters want the whole story—can go into more detail than electronic media
If Contacted by the Media

- We’re here to help—call me to discuss possible questions, or to find out what the reporter wants
  - Joan Wall 292-4064
- Let us know if media contacts you—so we can track articles, etc.
- Be positive and accessible