

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

The main goal of reporters is to gather information and develop factual stories to inform and update the public. The main goal of the News & Media Relations staff in the Office of Communications is to shine a spotlight on Muhlenberg's people and programs. By connecting journalists with our faculty and staff experts, both these goals are met.

The director of news & media relations can provide guidance for faculty and staff members interested in working with the media, including offering personalized or group media training sessions. Contact news@muhlenberg.edu or 484-664-4343 for more information.

Whether an interview request comes directly to you through a reporter's email or phone call or through the director of news & media relations, here are tips for best practices before, during and after an interview.

IF A MEMBER OF THE MEDIA CONTACTS YOU DIRECTLY

- Faculty and staff **should not** act as a spokesperson for the College or provide information about the College's official position on an issue unless it is their role to do so. While conducting an interview, if a reporter asks questions which connect your area of expertise to events or experiences at the College, please do not provide any information. Instead refer them to the Office of Communications (484-664-3230) or the director of news & media relations (news@muhlenberg.edu, 484-664-4343) so that we may verify the appropriate information before it is conveyed to the reporter. We want to ensure any information provided is accurate and up to date.
- If you're contacted about doing an interview within your area of expertise and you'd like assistance or advice, please contact the director of news & media relations (news@muhlenberg.edu, 484-664-4343)
- Reporters often work with tight deadlines. If it's an interview you'd like to do, a quick reply affirming your interest is important. But don't feel pressured to do the interview right away. Instead:
 - » Ask the reporter what their deadline is and when an interview can be scheduled.
 - » Ask the reporter for more details about the interview topic and for some sample questions. If time allows, ask for the questions in writing.



PREPARATION IS KEY

- Prior to doing the interview, think through and write down the **three most important points** you would like to make during the interview. Use them as a guide throughout the interview to help you stay on message.
 - » **Always be honest.** But if a topic is potentially problematic, determine in advance how best to share the information accurately while minimizing potential negative publicity. Reach out to the director of news & media relations for help if you'd like.
- Share appropriate printed material with the reporter, especially if the subject matter is complex. If possible, send it to them in advance to help them structure their interview.

THE INTERVIEW

- Keep in mind the five C's of successful communication:
 - » **Clear:** Avoid academic or technical terms. Make sure your information can be understood by general audiences.
 - » **Concise:** It's challenging to translate complex ideas into soundbites but it's important that your information reaches the largest number of people possible. Plus, short comments are less likely to be edited.
 - » **Credible:** You are an expert in your field. Speak confidently to share this knowledge.
 - » **Colorful:** Brief examples or stories help make your information understandable and memorable.
 - » **Conversational:** Reporters are people too. Be friendly and helpful. Mutual trust and respect provide an opportunity for you to become an expert they turn to frequently.
- Remember your three most important points and politely steer the conversation back to them if you're being pulled in a direction you don't want to go.
 - » Alternatively, if the reporter isn't asking the questions that allow you to address these points, help further the story by suggesting questions and providing the answers that may do so.
- If a question is unclear, ask for clarification. If a question is based on information you believe is incorrect, take the opportunity to provide accurate information.
- If you don't have an answer to a question, let the reporter know and get back to them with the information as quickly as possible. Emailed responses work well if the answer is complex or potentially sensitive.
- Avoid saying, "No comment." If it's a question you can't or prefer not to answer, offer a brief explanation. For example, "I'm not familiar with the research you're referring to so I can't speak to it" or "It's the College's policy not to discuss lawsuits currently in litigation."
- "Off the record" responses may not be honored. A good rule of thumb: Assume that anything you say to a reporter might be published, including casual conversation before or after the official interview.

THE BROADCAST INTERVIEW

- Ask whether the interview will be live or edited. The good news: Most are taped in advance and edited before being broadcast.
 - » Before saying yes to a live interview, know that it often requires being very comfortable thinking on your feet. Prepare as much as possible.
- In edited interviews:
 - » Pause for a moment before answering questions. This gives you time to think through your answers and provides a clean sound bite for the reporter.
 - » If you don't like the way you worded an answer, ask to stop and begin again.
- You'll usually be asked to say and spell your name and title at the beginning of an interview for accuracy. Spelling and pronouncing Muhlenberg is helpful too!
- For television interviews, it's best to wear solid-color clothing and avoid distracting or reflective jewelry.
- Find a mirror just before going on camera to check for flyaway hair or clothing in need of an adjustment.
- A dry run in front of an iPhone or with family members or colleagues is beneficial. Practice articulating your main interview points until they feel fluid, including smoothly addressing or diverting from challenging questions. Watch for nervous habits like throat clearing or finger tapping.

POST-INTERVIEW

- Thank the reporter for their time and ask if they know when the article or segment is scheduled to run.
 - » Please let the director of news & media relations know when the piece will run. Once it's posted, it will be shared in the Berg Bulletin and on the [@MuhlenbergNews Twitter account](#).
- News reporters are not obligated to let you review a story before it runs and almost never do so.
 - » However, you can ask at the end of the interview if there are any points that still need clarification or what they expect the main story angle will be.
 - » Shortly after an interview, if you feel you misspoke or gave incorrect information during the interview, call the reporter as soon as possible to provide a correction.
- After the story appears:
 - » If you feel the piece is fair and deserving of praise, be sure to send a quick note of thanks to the reporter. Journalism is increasingly underfunded and under attack. Reporters rarely receive notes of appreciation for a job well done.

- » If there are factual errors in the piece, let the reporter know right away and ask if a correction can be made. Offer to provide additional information to verify an inaccuracy. Corrections also prevent inaccurate information from being used in future stories.
 - » If you're not pleased with the tone or focus of a piece but it is factually accurate, changes usually won't be made. You may still share your concerns with the reporter but only contact his or her editor as a last resort. However, the best practice here is to learn from the experience and apply those lessons when doing future media interviews.
- The director of news & media relations monitors the College's media coverage daily and will share the story or broadcast link with you, in the Berg Bulletin and on the [@MuhlenbergNews](#) [Twitter account](#).

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Director of News & Media Relations

news@muhlenberg.edu

484-523-3054 (c)

