Graduate Students in Extension

“Working with the Media” Workshop by Ann Brody Guy

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* Introductions
  + Mostly ESPM and ERG
  + Mostly more advanced students
  + Training is based on the training run for faculty and post-docs
* Why work with the media?
  + Help tell stories
  + Shape your message
  + More control over framing
  + Not much effort, often good rewards
  + Famous media personalities like Michael Pollen and Neil DeGras Tyson are powerful and reach a wide audience
  + Communicate with the public who fund science
  + Raise profile of your workplace
  + Help reporters get the stories right
  + Contributes to accurate science reporting
  + “Preparing a quote that is quote and accessible allows reports to get the stories right”
* Goals
  + Learn to convey points effectively
  + Learn some tools to interact conformably with the media
  + Learn to be in control of what you want to say
  + Understand current media environment
* What is news?
  + New, novel, challenge to status quo thinking, highly public facing topic, normally focused on results
  + NOT – anniversaries, small awards, small and mid sized grants, something that has been covered extensively, breakthroughs that are significant but so technical that only other scientists will care
  + News depends on the news outlet
  + Also anything of interest that is peer reviewed can get picked up and make a splash
* Scenarios for media interviews
  + Story on your study findings
  + Expert commentary on topic in your research area
  + Hot seat/conflict/ controversy
* When a reporter calls
  + Get information about the reporter
    - Name, outlet, phone, deadline
    - Deadline is often within a couple hours, important to know
  + Get information about the story
    - Is the premise correct?
    - Are you the right source or can you recommend a better one?
  + OK to tell them you’ll call back
    - Take time to collect your thoughts but note their deadlines. They often put out multiple calls for experts
* Preparing for an Interview
  + Create a key message – an overarching idea that can be expressed simply in one or two sentences
  + Quotes and sound bytes are SHORT and reporters are always in a hurry
  + Assume you are going to be cut short
  + Reporters do quote from a press release
  + However, prepare additional talking points so you are clear on what you want say regardless of the question are asked.
  + Message examples
    - Drought is changing wildlife behavior in the Wst, and humans must understand and adjust
    - New user-friendly websites uses CA climate change data available to help practioners….
  + Establish context/relevance: what is the societal or scientific problem?
    - Specific problem, larger scale context, power fact, cultural context
    - “Integrating renewables into the grid poses a fundamentally new problems”
    - “One in 3 American’s is obsess” – power fact
  + Non-scientists can understand complex things if you give them a familiar idea to build on
    - Forrest fire example: compare fires to earthquakes, anticipation not reaction
      * “We don’t try to fight earthquakes – we anticipate them in the way we plan
    - New website makes climate data available in a user-friendly format for planners, policy makers, and the public
      * “Users can…”
  + Delivering your message
    - Say it simply. Avoid or define jargon
    - Avoid getting bogged down in protracted explanations
    - Make your point and stop (RESIST the urge to fill pauses)
  + Staying on message
    - Redirect the conversation (“There isn’t a simple answer to that, but what’s important to remember is…”)
    - Beware of loaded questions and questions with assumptions
      * “I’m glad you are giving me the opportunity to explain that assumption”
      * “I can’t help but notice that there’s an assumption”
    - Don’t accept false facts or incorrect interpretations
      * EX: “Seeding clouds in the best way to combat climate change” -> “I’m glad you brought that up, actually, that’s 1980’s technology and we’ve come a long way.”
    - It’s OK to say I don’t know
    - It’s OK to start over and rephrase your answer
* Media formats and platforms
  + Everyone is looking for content and always scouting
  + Our owned-media ecosystems
    - Departments, up to the Colleges, up the UC system
* Broadcasts tips
  + Ask about format (live? Sound byte? Location? Purpose?)
  + Voice and appearance are part of the message that comes through the camera
    - Comb hair, dress neatly, **wear make-up** (make up is actually very important so you don’t look dead). Never refuse offered make-up.
    - Talk in a conversational tone, don’t be overly animated with tone , facial expressions, or body language
    - Lock in eye contact with the intereviewer, don’t look at the camera and don’t let your eyes wander
    - Sound authoritivative: deliver answers with confidence, avoid ending sentences on an up note.
* Social media
  + People are more likely to read stories from a known source
  + Can exist in its own right or amplify stories in other media
  + Quality vs. quantity: high-value followers can be just as good and quantity.
  + Tailor your message for the platform
* All media is visual
  + Have pictures for all your information
  + Document your research with photos, videos, vines
  + Take high resolution files
  + Record details, locations, and names of people in your photos.
  + Many people only look at pictures or pictures and quotes
  + IRG and human subjects, is this an issue? 🡪 If you don’t use it in your research (analyzing it) then it’s not under your IRB, unless the video is connected directly to the subjects
    - Best to get a release form. You can get these from the CNR media website (maybe?), if you are already doing paperwork at all, then have them sign a release form
    - Can use photos that don’t identify people (hands holding plants)
  + At public events, you don’t need release forms
* QUESTIONS:
  + Hot seat/conflict issues: what to do if contacted 🡪 generally direct them to the communications department.
    - Don’t sugar coat issues, but can provide emphasis
  + NOTE: Julie wants ESPM to send her any ideas about news stories
  + It’s valuable to you to use media to get your science out
  + How to get into high profile op-ed pieces
    - Make your language accessible
  + How to approach reporters
    - Personal relationships are good
    - Making a good pitch
    - Make sure media know about what you are doing
    - Press releases for news worthy stories (study a press release)
    - Practice!