

VMBS MEDIA RELATIONS GUIDE

To continue recruiting and retaining the best faculty, staff, and students, the Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences must be able to effectively share our story. Highlighting our accomplishments in teaching, research, service, and outreach through a strategic and coordinated media relations effort is a vital component to our success. Therefore, when contacted by the media for an interview, we must embrace the opportunity to showcase our school.

WHEN THE MEDIA CONTACTS YOU

1. Be friendly, helpful, and responsive.
2. Gather as much information from the reporter/producer as possible, including what news outlet they work for and their contact information.
3. Contact the Marketing & Communications team in the VMBS as soon as possible. They will be able to assist you with notifying the appropriate people within the college about the interview, as well as providing assistance specific to the requested interview.

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4. If the media keeps pressing you to talk to them, it is OK to repeat, "Please contact Jennifer Gauntt for further information." We never want to be rude or unkind, but reporting accurate information is crucial, so a single reporting source is of utmost importance.

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

1. Take time to distill your ideas to the three or four most important messages, or talking points, you want to communicate. Journalists can convey only a few points in a story, so make them count.
2. Messages should be clear, concise, easily understood by a mass audience, and mindful of the college's internal and external stakeholders and constituents.
3. Prepare memorable quotes, or sound bites, which help reporters convey your findings and opinions in a simple, punchy way. There are many types of effective sound bites, but the most common that puts research in perspective: "For the first time, we've found evidence that..."
4. If time permits, practice your quotes on colleagues, friends, or family members. Practice in front of a mirror to be sure you aren't making any subconscious movements that could be distracting.
5. Think of examples your audience can relate to—include local/area references, references to people's everyday lives, and/or analogies and metaphors, such as a geologist comparing a volcanic eruption to "smashing a champagne bottle instead of popping the cork."

WHEN CAMERAS ARE PRESENT

1. Have someone from the Marketing & Communications team with you.
2. Wear a unit identifier, lab coat, or appropriately branded shirt. Professional dress reinforces your expertise.
3. Do not wear sunglasses, even outside.
4. Realize that cameras could be on and photos could be taken of your laboratory, your office, and your classroom.

5. Identify what will be in the background of the video or photo, and make sure that measures are taken to represent our facilities well, as well as to protect the privacy of others in the vicinity.
6. Make sure your lab and everyone in it is research protocol compliant.
7. Notify those who may be near so they may avoid the area, if preferred.
8. Look at the reporter and not the camera, unless asked.
9. Avoid fidgeting, moving your hands too much, or sitting in swiveling chairs.

INTERVIEW TIPS

Do...

- Be aware of sound in the area. Equipment and/or other people in the vicinity can make hearing your answers difficult.
- Listen to the questions and ask the reporter to rephrase or repeat the question if unsure what the reporter is asking,
- Pause to collect your thoughts before answering a question.
- Keep your answers brief and to the point. This will help prevent answers from losing context if they have to be edited to fit in the space or time allowed.
- Use positive statements such as “The outcome of this study, while not what we expected, could lead to...”
- Focus on the purpose of the interview and highlighting the point of the story.
- Use bridging statements to bring answers back to your key messages. Examples:
 - “What is most important to remember is...”
 - “I don’t know the answer to that, but what I do know is...”
 - “It’s our policy not to discuss...but what I can tell you is...”
 - “What I think you’re asking is...”
 - “That’s not my particular field of expertise, but I can tell you...”
 - “That wasn’t the focus of our research; what we found is...”

Do NOT...

- Chew gum during your interview.
- Speculate about the meaning of results or a patient’s prognosis.
- Use technical jargon. Scientists and scientific disciplines have their own language, which often includes words and phrases that will either be unfamiliar to the general public or have a very different meaning. For instance, scientists understand a theory to be a description of how something works, but to most people, a theory is an unproven idea.
- Discuss money, litigation, or personnel matters; try to avoid humor.
- Answer questions that are beyond your expertise. If a journalist persists with tangential lines of questioning, you might suggest other resources or people who can answer those questions.
- Speak for others within or outside of the VMBS (such as collaborators at other institutions) without permission first.
- Fill the awkward silence. If you have answered the reporter’s question, after a few seconds ask if they have any other questions. If not, then let them know you need to get back to your work. When they ask, if you have anything else to add, be sure to say any your main talking points you didn’t get to mention earlier.

PLEASE CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION.

Marketing & Communications

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