Faculty Research Forum

In the Public Eye

Zoom Virtual Event: April 16, 2021
Why communicate

Inspire others to learn and grow

Improve the public’s understanding

Attract funding or investment

Spur unexpected endpoints:
  New collaborations
  Interdisciplinary work
Developing your strategy

What goals do I want to accomplish?
What audiences do I want to reach?
Which are the best ways to reach these audiences?
Who can I get to help me?
Who do I want to reach?

The public
Research sponsors
Policy makers
Investors/entrepreneurs
Prospective graduate students
How do I reach these audiences?

- **External media**
  - Interviews for print, podcasts, videos and TV
  - Op-eds, The Conversation, 1st-person pieces
- **Social media**
  - Which outlets are right for you and for your field?
  - What types of tweets/posts/videos get the most engagement?
- **Outreach to community groups, presentations, advising**
  - Find clubs, groups
- **Policy makers**
  - Work with campus partners
Who can help

Offices on campus that help with research communications

Strategy - Writing - Video production - Media outreach and preparation

- Office of Communications
- School of Engineering and Applied Sciences
- School of Public and International Affairs
- Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory
- The Humanities Council
- High Meadows Environmental Institute
- Office of the Dean for Research
- Andlinger Center for Energy and the Environment
- Your department or affiliated center (Comp Sci, Econ, Chemistry, CSML….)
Tips for working with on-campus communicators

- Consider your desired outcome. Who do you want to reach, and why?
- Which channels (social media, online articles, outside media) will help you achieve your goal?
- Notify communicators early - at the time your research is accepted for publication
- Find ways to create attractive visuals (images, video)
- Share the resulting article or video with your own audiences
- Use the DOI link when you tweet
Tips for engaging

- Clear language
- Boil your message down to a single sentence
- Find common ground with your audience (analogies, examples)
- Avoid the curse of knowledge (don’t assume everyone knows what a protein is)
- Don’t feel obligated to use specialist terms (use an everyday word if possible)
- Give people a reason to care:
  - Empathy, emotion, storytelling
  - Who will this help?
  - What was unexpected or surprising?
  - Why are you motivated to do this work?
- Concrete examples, be specific, include sensory details
- Provide striking visuals and video if possible
Tips for writing op-eds

Courtesy of the School of Public and International Affairs

- Be aware of the word count of submissions for that particular media outlet. (Most places won’t take a 3,000 word academic piece, for example, so you don’t want to send to them.)
- Read what they’ve been publishing in the past month. If your piece is too closely aligned to another, they’ll likely reject it.
- Your lede (or introductory sentence) should be a peg to a news item. This will increase the chances of acceptance. Then you can flow into your main points.
- The overall structure should mirror this:
  - Introductory sentence related to current events
  - Your thesis statement (what your research shows, for example).
  - Three facts that back-up your thesis.
  - A strong closing tying it back to the future of the country, your industry, or a particular policy issue
- Always avoid jargon and academic terms. Read op-eds to get a flavor of how these should be written. You have more wiggle room here for a “play on words” or interesting phrasing.
Tips for writing op-eds Part 2

- When pitching, remember to follow the instructions listed. Most want you to submit to a general inbox (opinion@nytimes.com). You can also copy the opinion editor of that paper and address them personally. (Dear Mark …) Use your contacts; if you know someone else at the paper, they may be willing to forward it.
- Send your text in the body of an email with a word count, proposed headline (knowing they’ll likely change it), your name. At the end, include a brief bio.
  - Some prefer Word documents, but we find these get stuck in spam filters. They’ll respond back if they want the Word doc.
- If they like it, they will generally follow-up quickly. You can send a reminder perhaps 48 hours later. (Sometimes a day later is too nagging/annoying.)
- Also check the instructions on the wait time. For some, it’s three business days. For others, it’s 10 business days. Plan accordingly.
- If you get rejected, save the email. Respond back to that email when you have another op-ed. If they take the time to respond, they might not mind hearing from you again (if enough time has passed).
- Do not submit simultaneous submissions; that’s just bad form.
- Never send a pitch on a Friday. Tuesday morning is the sweet spot.