

Section: Communication Guidebook
Subject: Media Relations
Approved by: Cabinet
Applies to: Faculty, staff, students, volunteers
Effective date: April 25, 2005

COLLEGE POLICY

A main objective of the Communications and Marketing Office is to enhance LaGrange College's reputation. Media relations, which includes press contacts ranging from a simple inquiry to a news conference, represents a significant opportunity to help achieve that goal. The media's influence on College stakeholders—including current and potential students and donors, alumni, community members, faculty and staff—points to media relations' importance.

The Communications and Marketing Office is responsible for LaGrange College media relations and directs the College's contact with the media to ensure that such interaction does, indeed, enhance the College's image and move it toward its vision of being the premier private liberal arts and sciences institution in the state. This responsibility includes both proactive and reactive involvement.

Proactive media relations takes place when the College reaches out to the media to convey its own messages, often promoting College milestones, innovative programs and achievements. Reactive media relations takes place when the College is contacted to respond to a media inquiry.

In either instance, it is vital that honest and accurate information—that aligns with the College's objectives—is provided.

PROCEDURE

Proactive Media Relations

Communications and Marketing is the direct link to the media, and all media contact flows through Communications and Marketing. Press/news releases for LaGrange College are sent *only* through Communications and Marketing.

If you become aware of information that you think should be released to the media, let the Communications staff know. The Assistant Director for Media Relations should be your first point of contact.

If you would like a release created about an *event*, complete the short form found at <http://www.lagrange.edu/communications/pressreleaseform.php> at least three weeks prior to the event. (More information about event promotion can be found in the Advertising and Event Promotion policy found at www.lagrange.edu/communications.)

The Communications staff will determine whether a release on a given subject has merit and whether it will likely be published. Please keep in mind that Communications cannot control what newspapers print or when, or what broadcast media air or when.

Oftentimes, the wide range of expertise of College faculty and staff can benefit the media *and* present the College in a favorable light. The Communications and Marketing Office maintains an Experts Guide and a Speakers Bureau listing that also are used proactively.

Reactive Media Relations

(What to do when a reporter calls)

The media contact LaGrange College for a number reasons. If the area of inquiry involves an administrative topic, a Cabinet-level spokesperson will likely be the appropriate contact. If, however, the inquiry involves a specific academic discipline, a faculty member will often be the best contact point.

If you are approached by a reporter and the subject matter involves an administrative or Collegewide issue, refer the reporter to the Communications and Marketing office. If the inquiry involves your personal area of expertise or “expert” opinion, you are free to set a tentative time to be interviewed (at least 2 hours away) and then call Communications and Marketing to inform the office of the inquiry.

For Collegewide issues, Communications will determine the appropriate campus person to address the subject, and will work with the resource to gather information and create talking points on the topic. For “expert” inquiries, the office will confirm that the subject should be addressed, and will brief the person on media interviews, possible talking points and potential pitfalls.

Communication during a crisis situation is covered in the Crisis Communications policy found at www.lagrange.edu/communications.

Awareness Leads to Preparedness

Advance notice of a topic that may provoke media interest is extremely helpful. If you become aware of such subject matter, please pass it along to Communications and Marketing so that the groundwork for a response can be laid. The College’s chances of being portrayed favorably are much greater if there is time for adequate preparation.

Likewise, if you see news vans, reporters or photographers on campus, please notify Communications immediately. If the Assistant Director for Media Relations is unavailable, contact the Director of Communications and Marketing. If he/she is unavailable, contact the Development Writer, who also is trained in media relations.

SUMMARY

The College’s Communications and Marketing Office is the institution’s direct link to the media, and all media contact flows through it. Press/news releases for LaGrange College are sent only through this office. If you become aware of information that you think should be released to the media let the Communications staff know, or fill out the press release request form found at <http://www.lagrange.edu/communications/pressreleaseform.php> . If you are approached by a reporter and the subject matter involves an administrative or Collegewide issue, refer the reporter to the Communications and Marketing office. If the inquiry involves your personal area of expertise or “expert” opinion, you are free to set a tentative time to be interviewed (at least 2 hours away) and then call Communications and Marketing to inform the office of the inquiry. If you see news vans, reporters or photographers on campus, please notify Communications immediately.

Tips for Media Interviews

Before the Interview:

- Know who the reporter is, what media outlet he or she works for, and what specific subject will be discussed.
- Develop the key points that you want to be sure to communicate. Consider the worst or most difficult question you may be asked.
- Remember: Appearance is important, especially if it's a television interview.

During the Interview:

- Don't relax too much. Jokes, gossip and cynical or silly remarks are out of place in an interview.
- Keep your answers clear and concise. When dealing with technical or complex information, make sure the reporter understands what you are talking about.
- Don't let the reporter put words in your mouth.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so and offer to find out and provide the information later.
- Avoid being defensive.
- Don't say "no comment." Simply say, "I don't want to talk about that right now," or explain why you can't address a specific topic (e.g. "We won't know for sure until an internal investigation is completed."). Turn the interview to what your key messages are.
- Assume everything you say will be quoted. Don't speak "off the record."
- Don't hesitate to state your main point or key messages more than once.

After the Interview:

- Let the reporter know you will be available to confirm facts or details. Contact them with late-breaking information, if appropriate.
- Don't expect to see the story before it is released. Most reporters do not let sources review stories.