

Who do I call?

	Contact	Phone number	E-mail address
Local newspaper			
<i>Assignment editor</i>			
<i>Education reporter</i>			
<i>Calendar reporter</i>			
<i>Editorial Page editor</i>			
<i>Web editor</i>			
Regional newspaper			
<i>Education reporter</i>			
<i>Calendar editor</i>			
<i>Editorial page editor</i>			
<i>Web editor</i>			
Local TV station			
<i>Assignment editor</i>			
<i>Reporter</i>			
<i>Calendar information</i>			
<i>Web editor</i>			
Local cable system			
<i>Calendar information</i>			
Local radio station			
<i>Calendar information</i>			
<i>Web information</i>			
Local blogger			
Local Web calendar (i.e. CitySearch.com)			

Press Pointers



For more information contact:

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Achieving
the Dream™

Community Colleges Count

What do you do if you want to call a reporter?

- Identify in advance all the media in your area: newspapers, television stations, magazines, free-circulation publications, Web sites, etc. Put together a list with their contact information (mail, e-mail and phone numbers), guidelines for submissions, and deadlines. Include the large papers that cover your region.
- Develop a relationship with reporters before you need them. Go to lunch with them, get to know their – and their editors' – interests and priorities.
- Think hard about whether the idea you want to pitch is truly news. News is timely, important and interesting. Reporters like stories that involve triumphs, tragedies, conflict, tension and controversy. Will it help readers see the world in a new way or challenge old assumptions? Is it related to something that's recently been in the news? Does it reflect a larger societal trend or issue? Is it of special community interest?
- Frame the idea in a way that will resonate with the reporter by using the questions above.
- Think about who your intended audience is and aim it at the reporter or medium best able to reach them. Think about which reporter and medium is best for a story (whether it's an education reporter, a business reporter who covers economic development, a columnist or feature writer who likes human interest stories). If it has strong visuals, be sure to call TV stations as well as print.
- If it's a routine announcement – a conference, a musical event, a new program, a building dedication – keep it brief. Send it to the reporter or editor who takes care of the section of the media (newspaper, TV station, Web site) it's most likely to appear (calendars, local notes, community notices, etc.) Don't hesitate to send it to more than one person at the same medium – one may not think it's appropriate but another one will.
- If you don't think it's something a newspaper or TV station will be interested in doing a major story about – even if a colleague insists it is – be willing to say no to a personal pitch or full press release. Reporters learn to ignore people who pitch bad stories – and pay attention to people who pitch good ones.

What is news?

Understanding what news is – that is, how reporters and editors define it – will help you understand what they're looking for when you're calling them about a story, or when they call you. And it can help you see where the best – and most likely – placement is for your story.

TO REPORTERS AND EDITORS, NEWS IS INFORMATION THAT IS TIMELY, IMPORTANT AND INTERESTING.

TIMELY: A major event that happened today (or is about to happen); a development in a continuing controversy; new information that is relevant to public life.

IMPORTANT: Reflects a trend or larger social issue; explains something that helps us see the world in a new way; will have a significant impact on the community.

INTERESTING: A topic that lots of people are talking about; a remarkable story about real people; a tale that involves tragedy, conflict or drama.

THE KEY TO GETTING YOUR STORY ACROSS IS MAKING IT PART OF AN INTERESTING NARRATIVE THAT INCLUDES PEOPLE WHOSE WORK REFLECTS THE INSTITUTION'S LARGER MISSION. TELLING THAT STORY CARRIES WITH IT THE INSTITUTION'S STORY.

Being in the media is good for your college and helping the community understand your role. It gives you an opportunity to show your value, expand your classroom, and inform and influence policymakers and the public.

But not everything is front page or 6 o'clock news. There are other kinds of news that may not be big stories but people in the community still want to know (examples: concerts, readings, seminars, conferences, programs, building renovations, grants, etc.)

For these, it's not how you pitch the story, but knowing the outlets that are looking for this information and putting it out in a concise way.

Outlets

IN PRINT: calendars, Best Bets suggestions, education notes columns

ON THE AIR: TV events calendars, cable TV public information channels, radio calendar updates

ON THE WEB: Local blogs, commercial events sites, newspapers, TV stations, radio stations

What do you do if a reporter calls you?

- Always return phone calls as soon as possible; reporters usually have tight deadlines. Be sure to ask them their deadline so you know how much time you have.
- Make sure you're knowledgeable on the subject you're being asked about. If you aren't, ask to call back so you can gather your thoughts and necessary information. Know the issues – cold.
- If your college has a public information office, bring them in for help.
- Know what you want to say. Before you begin, decide two or three key points you want to get across and be sure you make them in the interview, even if you're not asked.
- Give simple and direct answers in plain English. Speak clearly and briefly. Avoid acronyms and technical jargon.
- Offer human and real-life examples when applicable. It helps the reporter answer the most important, often forgotten question: "So what?"
- Prepare background information to help the reporter better understand the subject and reduce the chance for errors.
- Direct the reporter to your Web site if you have one (and it's up to date). It allows them to doublecheck information, names and spellings.
- Never lie or mislead a reporter. Be honest, responsive and factual.
- Prepare for difficult questions and never say, "No comment." It raises red flags, and is seen as rude by readers and viewers. Instead, explain why you can't or won't answer the question.
- Be extremely cautious if asked to go off the record. If you don't already have a trusting relationship with the reporter, assume that NOTHING is off the record.
- Respond to negative, leading questions with positive statements.
- Keep your cool even if the reporter doesn't. Don't antagonize or anger them. Staying calm gives you more control.
- Feel free to ask the reporter to let you doublecheck their story when it's done. Although journalistic ethics usually won't allow them to let you review the story before it runs, they may let you verify specific information or quotes.
- Give the reporter feedback. If there's a major error, call the publication and ask for a correction. If it's minor, it may be better to let it go. And if you feel the story was well done, let the reporter know that, too.