

## Auburn University Montgomery

**Title:** Guidelines for Media Relations

**Responsible Office:** University Relations

### **I. PURPOSE**

The Media Relations Guidelines are designed to enhance the interaction between University personnel and the media. The purpose is to facilitate the exchange of information, provide facts or expert opinions that could be educational or otherwise beneficial to the public, and protect the fine reputation of the University and its employees.

Good media relations benefit both Auburn University at Montgomery and the public. When faculty and staff help the media gather information or provide their expert opinion, they are also helping to communicate Auburn Montgomery's story to the public. Through these efforts, AUM can build community support and attract students. Providing this kind of assistance also discharges our responsibility as an institution supported by public funds to be accountable to the public.

### **II. EFFECTIVE DATE**

April 27, 1995

#### **REVISED**

May 1, 2007

### **III. APPLICABILITY**

These guidelines are available and applicable to faculty, staff, leaders of student organizations or anyone else who works at or is associated with the University and can be assumed to present an official opinion or position of the University.

### **IV. RESPONSIBILITY**

The Office of University Relations has responsibility for implementing and updating these guidelines as necessary. Every manager is responsible for ensuring the individuals under his/her scope of supervision are aware of and have access to these guidelines.

### **V. GENERAL PROCEDURES**

A. University Relations is the primary contact for media. Reporters and editors usually make the University Relations office their first point of contact in covering a story. In these cases, University Relations staff members arrange interviews and photographs. The faculty and staff members who will be interviewed are briefed about the reporter's needs and objectives.

- B. University Relations staff will coordinate any interview and/or exchange of information between the media and the University contact if University Relations is the first contact and/or the person to be interviewed requests the assistance of University Relations.
- C. Reporters cannot be compelled to go through University Relations channels, however, and may go directly to individual sources on campus. In fact, reporters in a hurry to gather information may use the directory of experts provided to them by University Relations or the on-line directory. This information helps journalists locate Auburn Montgomery faculty and staff members who have agreed to serve as “experts” on selected subjects.

If any individual at the University has contact with the media through an interview, informal questions, or other means it is very helpful for that person to make University Relations aware of the contact. Reporting this information allows the University Relations staff to record or clip the news piece for future promotion for Auburn Montgomery. Media contacts for expert information reflect very positively on Auburn Montgomery and the faculty and staff. University Relations documents those contacts for the purpose of monitoring the positive impact of the University. Examples of this type of contact would include both requests for expert opinions about a faculty member’s subject matter area *and* interviews about upcoming campus events.

Most inquiries by journalists will concern activities that are a matter of public record and that AUM has an interest in promoting. Sometimes however, reporters will inquire about documents, litigation, or personnel records. All *inquiries* from the media about Auburn Montgomery practices or unusual events should be reported to the University Relations staff as soon as possible. The purposes include ensuring the University Relations staff is aware of any issues related to the University and/or likely to be identified with the Auburn Montgomery name in any form of media (e.g., television, newspaper) and identifying potential problems or issues that may impact the University. This allows the staff to prepare other individuals at the University in anticipation that they too may be contacted. Also, once the contact has been made, the staff can screen the paper or television report to ensure that the information reported by the media is complete and accurate, and, if not, University Relations staff can address this issue. An example of this type of contact would include a question about a lawsuit that impacts the University. Another example is a reporter contacting a professor about a former student who committed a crime.

- D. The role of the University Relations staff in media contacts with other University personnel is to coordinate the contact or interview, assist the University personnel involved, and provide follow-up information to the media. None or all of these

activities may be necessary depending on the point of contact and the request of the University personnel involved. University Relations may coordinate the date and time of the interview between the University personnel (e.g., faculty member) and the reporter *if* the University faculty or staff member asks University Relations staff to assist. University Relations staff will greet the media on campus when possible to encourage a positive relationship between the University and the media *and* to facilitate future information exchange between University Relations and the media. Upon request, University Relations will provide assistance to the faculty or staff member in preparing for the interview or providing information to the media following the interview. The role of University Relations is not to screen, limit, or in any way modify the information provided by the faculty or staff member to the media, but rather to assist the faculty or staff member to the extent he/she requests assistance. Some faculty or staff members are extremely experienced and comfortable talking with the media. This is not true for all employees. The University Relations staff is available and willing to help upon request. Specific tips for working with the media are located in Appendix A of these guidelines.

- E. If a media representative contacts a faculty or staff member requesting the name of a faculty or staff member who can provide expert information in a specific area, the faculty or staff member should direct the media to University Relations. Not every “expert” is comfortable providing information to or has agreed to speak with the media.

## VI. RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC

If a faculty or staff member is not the designated University contact to communicate an issue that involves the University’s position, that faculty or staff member should avoid presenting information to the media that may imply that he or she is presenting the University’s official position. Instead, the faculty or staff member should direct the media contact to University Relations.

Some types of information should not be released by Auburn Montgomery employees. Refer any questions from journalists on the following subjects to the University Relations office so the staff may contact the appropriate AUM administrators for a response. Some examples of the types of information that required special consideration with regard to release to the media or anyone outside the University include the following:

- **Student Records** - The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 provides that Auburn Montgomery will maintain the confidentiality of student records. Generally, the only facts about a student or former student that will be released are the dates of attendance, major, and whether the student graduated.
- **Faculty and Staff Records** - An employee’s name, job title, department, and salary are all a matter of public record. The University Relations staff will clear the release of this information with the personnel director. All other information on Auburn Montgomery employees is confidential and will not be released without permission.

- **Contracts and Grants** - Auburn Montgomery contracts with governmental agencies or businesses are public documents, but the results of work performed under the contracts may be confidential. The University Relations staff will clear information about contracts with the project director and information about awards and finances with the Vice Chancellor for Finance.
- **Litigation and Law Enforcement** - Auburn Montgomery employees should refrain from providing facts or opinions regarding lawsuits to which Auburn Montgomery is a party. The University Relations staff will clear request for such information with the Chancellor.

Any questions concerning an arrest or other law enforcement activity on the Auburn Montgomery campus should be referred to the University Relations staff for coordination with Campus Police and law enforcement authorities.

## VII. INTERPRETATION

Any questions about these guidelines or suggestions for modifications or additions should be submitted to the Director of University Relations or the Vice Chancellor for Outreach.

APPROVAL TO PROCEED: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

### APPENDICES

Appendix A - When You are Contacted by the Media

## Auburn University at Montgomery When You are Contacted by the Media

The following pointers may be useful if you are contacted directly by a reporter.

### When a Reporter Telephones

#### Find out:

- The name of the reporter, telephone number, and name of the news organization he or she represents.
- The reason for the call, if it's not immediately apparent. Don't hesitate to ask.
- The specific questions he or she wants answered. Take notes.

#### Before you answer any questions, ask yourself:

- Am I qualified to talk to the media on the subject?
- Do I want more time to check with someone else, to confirm or to work out a well-reasoned response?

If you have doubts about your authority or ability to respond to questions immediately, tell the reporter that you or someone else will call back. Ascertain the reporter's deadline and make sure that you or someone else responds as soon as possible. Remember, it's the reporter's deadline, not yours. Don't be pressured into a hasty response. If you don't believe you can meet a deadline, say so up front and either refer the person to someone else in your department or in University Relations. Reporters would rather you say no to a request than give them false hope and leave them scrambling at the last minute for another source.

If you talk to member of the press you probably will be quoted. Radio reporters may wish to record telephone conversations. You have the right to know if you are being recorded and to refuse if you are unprepared.

#### "No comment"

Try to avoid saying "no comment" in response to a reporter's questions. "No comment" is unnecessarily curt and can imply impatience or unwillingness to be helpful. It can also imply something else you probably don't mean to communicate – that you have something to hide.

There is nothing wrong with saying "I don't know..." (if that is the truth), or "Let me find someone else who can help you..." or "I'm not in a position to talk about that at this time." Most reporters will understand that your authority to answer questions is limited by your knowledge and position, especially if you can guide them to other sources for the information they need.

#### "Off the record"

Avoid off the record conversation. As with a "no comment" response, a request to go off the record arouses suspicion that you have information that someone would like to conceal. Providing

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information first and then asking to keep it off the record also does not work. Reporters are likely to use anything you provide them.

### Should you ask for pre-publication review?

Never. Some reporters will offer to call you and read back your statements, but others will not. Most reporters take offense at the idea that their work should be reviewed before publication. Most editors and publishers prohibit pre-publication review. Resist the temptation to make granting an interview contingent on getting a chance to see the story before it is printed or broadcast.

### Never tell a reporter how to write the story

It is important to keep in mind that the article the reporter is writing is not necessarily a public relations piece for the University. The reporter's job is to report the story as accurately as possible. Your job as a source is to provide information related to the story and/or your expert opinion. Trying to dictate the content of a story often can have a negative effect.

## **When a Reporter Visits**

The same principles that apply to telephone calls from reporters apply to personal visits. You need not respond immediately to questions or agree to be interviewed if you are not prepared – even if the reporter is standing in front of you with pencil or microphone in hand.

Offer to make an appointment for a future interview time if you are not prepared to comment on the subject. Refer the reporter to the University Relations office if he or she has a more immediate need. In any case, please notify University Relations of the transaction so that they can clip the newspaper or magazine article or record the show and document the good publicity the University is receiving.

## **If You Need Help**

Call University Relations staff members during operating hours and at other times if an emergency arises.

Many faculty and staff members have extensive experience providing information to and participating in interviews with the media. Reporters may go directly to these individuals for information. Even if you do not need help coordinating with your interview, it would be helpful the University Relations office if you would make them aware of the contact. The University Relations staff is responsible for tracking media contacts on campus, and they work to develop good relationships with reporters. A University Relations staff member may want to greet the media representative and introduce him/herself to establish a good relationship for future contacts.

Good coordination among Auburn Montgomery units is as important to the media relations as it is to other activities: It can prevent duplication of effort or inadvertent harm to other Auburn

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Montgomery objectives. The University Relations staff may suggest other journalists who would be interested in the same story.

Helping journalist cover activities at Auburn Montgomery is a valuable public service. With your help, Auburn Montgomery can build community support. The University Relations staff welcomes the opportunity to assist you, either for information or publicity requests.