The How and Why of Working with the Media

Lori Bona Hunt
News Service Director
Communications and Public Affairs
Introductions
What I Do

- Tell U of G’s ‘stories about people, research
- Bridge between University faculty, staff, students, and the media.
- Write and issue news releases, pitch ideas, help reporters find sources, deal with media.
- Prepare people to talk to the media; serve as spokesperson for University.
- Publicize your research
- Optimize media interactions
- Handle interviews/stories involving conflict
WHY ‘Do Media?’
Why “Do Media?” (and At Guelph, Portico for that matter)

- Enhances reputation
- Chance to influence public attitudes and policies
- Gains recognition for research
- Communicates importance of university
- Keeps other researchers informed
- Builds relationships w/parents, alumni, etc.
- Funding agencies require it
Why The Media Wants Help From Universities

- Research is new and innovative
- Universities are the place for the kind of stories readers/viewers want
- Tend to be helpful to media (media relations officers, news services, etc.)
- Professors/University employees are “the best” sources
- In short: the media needs YOU!
Today’s ‘Media’

- There is intense competition to “be first”
- Reporters willing to accept “news” that in the past they would have turned down, this includes unpublished research and questionable “experts”
- Reporters accepting ‘non traditional’ sources more often, (e.g. social media, anonymous sources, etc.)
- “We only have to be right for right now”
- Media people have responsibility to guard reputations of institutions, ‘experts’
A Bit About Reporters/Producers

- Most are generalists, they know a little about a lot of things
- ‘Beat’ reporters: Cover specific subject
- Most reporters/producers make an effort to cover both/all sides of a story
- Deadlines are tight. Most only have a few hours to write/produce
- They have very little control after the story is written / handed over to host
- They write for a ‘general audience’
How We Help ‘Shape’ Media

- News releases
- Story/Idea pitches
- ‘Advertising’ Guelph’s expertise
- Including University messaging in interviews
Popularizing Science, Research

- Must be told in ‘story’ format
- Language, terminology must be simple (KISS rule)
- Must explain why it matters; why general public should care
- Must be willing to emphasize the catchy, quirky, unusual while explaining the science
- It IS possible!
What are News Releases?

- Goal is to tell the public about goings on at University via the media.
- News releases are targeted to reporters and producers BUT also to inform the public via the web page.
- They must have ‘news’ value to be attractive to the media.
- Intended to spark interest of reporters-who will then write their own stories!
New Study Compares Mothers, Fathers Who Kill Their Children

Thursday, October 29, 2015 — News Release

“How could this have been prevented?” That was the first thought for University of Guelph sociology professor Myrna Dawson upon learning last month about a Winnipeg woman charged with killing her two-month-old daughter.

Dawson asked herself the same question this past summer after a Montreal man killed his 10-month-old-son and then himself.

And she pondered it again this month after hearing about a woman who threw her six-month-old child from a New York City apartment – the third such infant death in three months in that city.

A recognized expert on homicide and a longtime member of Canada’s first Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, Dawson says we need better intervention and social supports and improved understanding of psychological and social factors that are often at play in parents’ lives.

Her latest research appeared in a recent issue of the journal Child Abuse and Neglect.

In one of the most extensive reviews of filicide (the killing of a child under age 18 by a parent), she examined Statistics Canada data covering more than half a century of such cases — the longest period for a study of this kind in any
Canadian dads more likely to kill their kids than moms, study says

New study finds men more likely to kill their children than women and the gender gap is growing.
Dads more likely to kill their kids than moms
Zoo Life Erodes Elephant Health, Study Finds
December 11, 2008 – Campus Bulletin

Female elephants living in protected populations in Africa and Asia live longer than those in captivity in European zoos, according to new research by an international team of scientists that includes a University of Guelph professor.

The study led by Guelph Prof. Georgia Mason was published in the Dec. 12 issue of *Science*, the world’s leading journal of scientific research. Mason conducted the research with Ros Clubb, her former graduate student, and four other researchers from the United Kingdom and Kenya.

Following the paper’s publication, news stories about Mason’s research have appeared in more than 1,000 newspapers, magazines, and broadcast news reports around the world, including the *New York Times*, *Time* magazine, the *Globe and Mail*, *National Geographic*, *New Scientist*, the *Los Angeles Times*, National Public Radio, CBC radio, ABC News, Discover magazine, *Nature* magazine, the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Telegraph*, *Scientific American*, *Times of India* and *China Daily*.

The findings could mark the end of a long-standing debate about the physical and mental well being of zoo elephants, and may also bring about improvements in how these animals are kept.
Critical Report on Health of Zoo Elephants Is Debated

An Asian elephant in a zoo in Europe.

By CORNELIA DEAN
Published: December 11, 2008

Living in a zoo drastically shortens the lives of Asian and African elephants, making the animals seven times more likely to die early, a new scientific report says.

The research involved 96 elephants from 22 zoos in the United States, Europe and Australia. It found the average life span of elephants in zoos was 48 years, compared with 270 years in the wild.

Scientists said the findings would help change the way zoos treat elephants, who were bred and raised to be self-sufficient but now live in small enclosures.

The report, in the journal Zoo Biology, recommended that zoos treat the elephants as if they were sick, giving them regular checkups and medication to fight diseases.

It also said zoos should treat their elephants with respect, allowing them to live in large open spaces and giving them access to the outdoors.

Zookeepers said they were concerned about the report but argued that elephants in zoos were not treated as poorly as the report implied.

They said the elephants were given the best care possible, with medical staff on hand to monitor their health and provide treatment when necessary.
Wild Elephants Live Longer Than Their Zoo Counterparts

Maryann Mott
for National Geographic News
December 11, 2008

Wild elephants in protected areas of Africa and Asia live more than twice as long as those in European zoos, a new study has found.

Animal welfare advocates have long clashed with zoo officials over concerns about the physical and mental health of elephants in captivity.

British and Canadian scientists who conducted the six-year study say their finding puts an end to that debate once and for all.

"We're worried that the whole system basically doesn't work and improving it is essential," said lead author Georgia Mason, a zoologist at the University of Guelph in Canada.

Obesity and stress are likely factors for the giant land mammals' early demise in captivity, she said.

Until these problems are resolved, the authors are calling for a halt to importing wild elephants, and breeding them in facilities.
The ‘Prof’essional Expert

And now, in our studio, we have a military expert who'll analyze what an earlier expert had to say about what the experts before him said.
Georgia Mason

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Expert In
- Animal behaviour in captivity
- Animal welfare
- Animals adaptation to captive housing
- Behavioural biology
- Physiological needs of animals
- Stereotypic animal behaviour
- Zoology

Bio/Research
Georgia Mason is a behavioural biologist who studies how animals adapt to captive housing conditions (or fail to), especially conditions that meet their physiological needs but are too small or monotonous to allow natural behaviour. She is also interested in the validation of animal welfare indic... Click to Expand >>

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The sentient debate: Animal legal rights at centre of recent court cases
Profs, Student in the News

Wednesday, September 23, 2015 — In The News

Prof. Evan Fraser, Geography, and student Samantha Pascoal wrote an op-ed column in the Toronto Star on September 19, in which they discussed food insecurity in Canada. In the column, Fraser and Pascoal noted that poverty, crop diversity and food trade agreements have all had an impact on food security. Fraser has created the website feedingninebillion.com, which aims to generate discussion and solutions to global food security issues.

Research from the Bioproducts Discovery and Development Centre (BDDC) at U of G was featured in the Globe and Mail and CBC News on Sept. 23. Prof. Amar Mohanty, Plant Agriculture, and researchers at the BDDC helped develop new compostable single-serve coffee pods in partnership with Club Coffee. The company hopes the biodegradable pods will lessen the piles of plastic coffee pods in landfills each year.

Prof. Georgia Mason, Animal Biosciences, was interviewed by the National Post on Sept. 22. In the story, Mason discussed a potential move by some jurisdictions, including Quebec, to give animals more rights. While a change, she said the change is less revolutionary than some might believe. She is a behavioural biologist who researches animal behaviour and welfare.
But Not Every Scholar is Keen—Why Not?

- Often think expertise limited to specialty
- Have set ideas about expert vs. lay opinion
- Worried about getting involved in controversy/conflict
- Over exposure
- Can cause friction internally - even here at U of G
Play it Safe or Wade into Controversy?

- Should feel free to share expert opinion, you are ‘best source possible’
- Remember: “if it bleeds it leads,” rules, so often, will be seeking expertise when story is negative, or there are conflicting opinions
- Feel free to tell your opinion: be truthful, don’t downplay, don’t exaggerate
- Do not step too far outside of your expert boundaries-feel free to say so!
Analysis

The politics of global maternal health

By: Candace Johnson
Posted: 02/3/2016 3:00 AM | Comments: 1
Football aside, Super Bowl matchups are also a battle of the brands

TIMOTHY DEWHRIST

The Super Bowl occasionally features a coincidental dash of brands on the field.

Nationalistic fervour was on full display for Super Bowl XXXIX as the Patriots faced the Eagles, amid America’s post-9/11 patriotic surge. And the Packers and Steelers exemplified industrial brands competing against one another for Super Bowl XLV, pointing to a blue-collar ethos soon after the economic downturn.

Perhaps this year’s matchup between the Broncos and Panthers is not such a coincidence, given that nearly half the National Football League’s 32 teams use animals for branding purposes.

The Denver Broncos made their debut in 1960 and the team logo was modified in 1997 to depict a more intimidating and aggressive-looking animal, with illuminated and raging eyes.
Preparing for the Interview

- Be positive: Remember you are in charge, this is an opportunity to tell your story.
- Expect to cover the basics: Who, what, why, where, when & how.

- Prepare your message: Determine two to three key points. Prepare but don’t memorize, and then stick to your messages.

- Know your shows: Guelph Mercury or Rogers TV will be different experience than Canada AM and Globe and Mail.

- Ask yourself questions, consider preparing a Q&A.

- Be patient! Know in advance that the reporter may be unprepared or lack knowledge about what you are discussing—YOU are the expert!
Remember Your Audience
Interview Tips

- Nothing is off the record!
- Beware of long pauses
- Make the negative positive
- Never say no comment
- Keep it simple: remember the teenager dinner party rule
- Speak slowly; less is more
- Keep your cool
- Set the record straight
- Tell the truth!
During the Interview

- You are in charge!
- Maintain eye contact Brush up on your acting
- Answer the question - Think ‘real world’
- Repeat yourself
- You can lose it
- Do not ask to read/see story
- Expect distractions
- What not to wear, mind your posture
- Cutting room floor will be cluttered
- Expect the unexpected
When the News is Not So Good
Why do ‘Negative’ media?

- We have an obligation to be open, truthful, accountable.
- Chance to tell story on your own terms.
- Most of the time, media will not ‘go away’
- ‘Teenager’ rule: truth but not whole truth
- For experts, chance to weigh in on public debate on important topics, what universities are all about!
- Key is having a strategy/messaging and knowing what not to say.
How to Answer Reporter’s Questions

- Reporters cannot make you say anything you do not want to say;
- What you divulge is up to you!
- If you don’t want to see it on the 6 p.m. news, do not say it!
- Prep is key
If you find that the reporter is steering the interview away from the subject area that you feel comfortable discussing, bring it back by using **bridges** or bridging phrases that lead to your message.
Let Go of the Negative, Focus on the Positive
“Loaded Question”
Research on animals is barbaric. WHY does the University do this? ?

- Research provides important information about the health and well-being of animals, and how science can help them live better lives. It can also lead to treatments that help both animals and humans.
“Hypothetical Question”
What will the University do if OMAFRA cuts the budget for the partnership agreement?”

“I wouldn’t want to speculate. What I do know is that we are working diligently with OMAFRA to focus services on priority areas.”
“Personal Opinion”
Do you believe that the students had a right to storm the Board of Governors meeting to protest the tuition increases?

- My personal opinion is not important here. What’s important is that there we have due process, and will not negotiate with a group issuing ultimatums during a protest.
Speaking on behalf of Others

Why did NSERC turn down U of G’s application for a Strategic Projects grant?

I cannot speak for NSERC. I do know that the application was complete, thorough and met all of the requirements for funding.
Prof. Jane Doe says that neonics are not negatively affecting pollinators. Do you think her study is bogus?

- I have not read Prof. Doe’s study. I can tell you that our research has found a direct link between the use of these pesticides and the foraging or honeybees.

- OR “Our study reached a different conclusion. We found a direct link between the use of neonics and a reduction in the effectiveness of pollinators.”
“Boxed in Question”

Are you going to increase tuition or maintain the status quo?

- Our goal is to provide the best quality education that we can during difficult times. We will discuss tuition and other budget matters during the next Board of Governors meeting.
What If They Get It Wrong?

Options: writing a letter to the editor; calling the station’s/newspaper’s managing editor; writing your own news release/news bulletin to clarify the situation; asking for a correction or retraction; ignoring it; or taking legal action.
Defamation, Libel & Malice

- **Defamation:** Spoken or written words that falsely and negatively reflect on a living person’s or an organization’s reputation.

- **Slander:** Spoken defamation.

- **Libel:** Written defamation. Generally, radio and TV broadcasts that are defamatory are considered libel.

- **Actual malice:** The act of publishing or broadcasting statements that are known to be false or a reckless disregard for the truth.

- **Fair comment:** Freedom of the press to write/talk about matters of public interest.
Proving Defamation

- Must prove what was said/written is FALSE.

- Public figures must prove actual malice.

- Private people do not have to prove actual malice, but definition of “private” can change.
Don’t Forget Us!

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