

Middlebury College
Office of Public Affairs



Making the Most
of the Media



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Meet Public Affairs

Welcome This handy booklet is meant to help you better understand what we do in Public Affairs and how we can help you help **Middlebury College** get some positive exposure in the media. All of the information and tips included in this booklet are available online at www.middlebury.edu/pubaff

Who we are



SARAH RAY, DIRECTOR

Sarah joined Public Affairs in 1997. She began her career in advertising and later worked in book publishing at Doubleday and then Scribner's in New York City. After moving to Vermont, she became manager of public relations for Bruegger's bagel bakeries.



BLAIR KLOMAN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Blair joined Public Affairs in 2005. She has worked in advertising, interactive media, journalism and education, and has also managed her own marketing communications business. She graduated from Princeton University and has a master's degree from Bread Loaf School of English.



STEPHEN DIEHL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Stephen joined Public Affairs in 2007. Prior to Middlebury, he served as director of communications for Green Mountain College and for the Orvis Company. He's a graduate of Indiana University and has a master's degree in advertising and public relations from Marquette University.

What we do

- ① Support the mission of Middlebury College in its efforts to attract the highest quality students, faculty and staff by building and maintaining positive communication with the local and national media.
- ② Provide the media with timely information about people, programs and activities at Middlebury by doing 100+ press releases a year.
- ③ Bring newsworthy story ideas about Middlebury to the media's attention—ideas that are fresh, timely, topical, unusual and/or important.
- ④ Connect reporters, editors and producers with Middlebury faculty and staff who can contribute commentary to their news stories.
- ⑤ Help faculty and staff develop and submit opinion pieces to the appropriate media outlets.

The results of these ongoing efforts can be measured by the numerous media mentions Middlebury receives each month. (See Midd in the News on our Web pages at www.middlebury.edu/about/archive.)

: **Consider This** What do you think it would
 : cost to place a page one ad in the **New York**
 : **Times** or **Wall Street Journal**? THAT'S the
 : value we get when Middlebury College is
 : mentioned in these high-profile stories.

Meet the Media



WITH THE IMMEDIACY OF THE INTERNET, today's media are no longer limited to print, radio and TV. We may feel remote here in Vermont, but even the smallest blurb in the online edition of the *Campus* can become a national sensation within minutes. The more “in control” we can be of our own news, the better.

Whom we contact depends largely on the news we are delivering. A key resource for us is our annual subscription to a regularly updated media database that provides targeted contact information for active media professionals around the world.

Some of our local and regional media

Addison Independent
Rutland Herald
Burlington Free Press
Seven Days
Associated Press Vermont Bureau
Vermont Public Radio (VPR)
WCAX-TV
WPTZ-TV
New England Cable News (NECN)
Fox News 44
Vermont Life
Yankee Magazine

Some of our national relationships

Associated Press
Bloomberg News
Chronicle of Higher Education
Inside Higher Ed
University Business
New York Times
Wall Street Journal
Boston Globe
National Public Radio (NPR)
Business Week
Sierra Magazine
U.S. News and World Report

Building relationships is an invaluable part of our everyday jobs.

Reporters usually call with a deadline of NOW and if we can connect them with answers quickly, they are more likely to turn to us again in the not-so-urgent future, particularly when they are writing larger trend stories and need multiple quotes from a range of schools. *These relationships are also essential in the event of a negative story*—media professionals who work with us regularly will trust that we have provided them with the most comprehensive information possible regarding a sensitive issue.

: When the history department officially banned
: the use of Wikipedia as a citable source, it
: didn't take long for the media to catch on to
: the controversy. First, the news appeared in
: the **Campus**, then on various blogs, and finally
: the national media wanted in on the story.
: Professors of history Neil Waters and Don
: Wyatt stepped in for multiple phone
: interviews, and ultimately “**NBC Nightly**
: **News**” came to campus with a reporter and
: camera crew and then aired a story about
: Wikipedia that featured extensive footage of
: Waters and his students.

Making News



WE HAVE GREAT STORIES TO TELL—about faculty, students, academic initiatives, institutional innovations, environmental leadership, major events and plenty more. Many have the potential to be featured in the media; the key is to identify which stories are most newsworthy—and when.

Things the media like

Annual and seasonal events

Conflict and controversy

Trends

Anniversaries

Topical news

Human interest

Some things to consider when determining the “news value” of an idea

- ① Have you seen similar stories on the topic in the past?
- ② Bear in mind the “So What?” factor: Who is the audience? Why should they care?
- ③ Is there a particular reporter who covers this topic regularly?
- ④ Does your idea have broad appeal, or is it more suited to a smaller, more focused audience?
- ⑤ Do you have facts and statistics to support your idea? Are they simple to state (and understand)?

Associate Professor of Psychology Barbara Hofer knew she had something interesting on her hands when the results of her latest research started to come together, including a survey of Middlebury first-year students regarding their communication with their parents conducted by Hofer and one of her students, senior Elena Kennedy. She called our office and we began talking about how we could help get her news out. After a series of short interviews that led to smaller quotes in various newspapers, **Newsweek** eventually featured a multipaged story titled “The Fine Art of Letting Go.” Hofer was quoted several times, and statistics from the Middlebury survey appear in enlarged type in the article.

What’s good publicity?

WE CONSIDER ANY STORY OR MENTION that reinforces Middlebury’s reputation as a leader in higher education to be positive. Sometimes this can be obvious, such as a flattering story about a faculty member, student or program. Other times it can be more subtle—perhaps a story that is not about Middlebury, specifically, but shows the expertise of our faculty, or a story about a controversial subject that demonstrates our willingness to tackle tough issues. Keep in mind that reporters have thousands of colleges and tens of thousands of potential faculty experts to choose from, so we’re very pleased when they choose Middlebury.

Publicizing Your Event



THE EASIEST WAY TO REQUEST A PRESS RELEASE for an event or an announcement that you want to share with the outside (non-campus) world is to use our online submission form **at least three weeks in advance** at

www.middlebury.edu/forms/about/pubaff/submit_form.php.

Just fill out the form with all the requested information, and one of us will be in touch.

Here are a few things to keep in mind

- ① **Please submit** your information at least **three weeks prior** to your event so we have time to write, review, and revise the information with you.
- ② **We will contact the media** two weeks prior to your event.
- ③ We only publicize events that are **open to the public**.
- ④ **Photos are a great addition** to any release—especially photos of speakers. Please send only high resolution jpegs.

When we heard from Bill Hegman, geographic-information-systems specialist in the geography department, that Middlebury senior Kayla Race had finished her interactive food-mapping project, we decided it would make a great little story for the “Short Subjects” section of the **Chronicle of Higher Education**. We contacted the editor—someone we often pitch story ideas to—and he loved the idea. We sent in a picture, and “Food Flight” appeared in the next edition, including quotes from both Hegman and Kayla Race.



Writing Op-Eds



GREAT LIST OF TIPS FOR WRITING AN OPINION PIECE is available on our Web site, at www.middlebury.edu/about/pubaff/oped/. Please take time to read and review it each time you begin an opinion piece. The rules are fairly universal, and the more in line you are with the basic requirements, the more likely you are to get some attention.

Keep it current Be sure your topic is relevant to current news.

Be straightforward Don't be subtle—get to your point.

Keep it short 600–750 words is the limit; use short sentences and paragraphs.

Make your point In the first paragraph.

Advocate your view Don't feel the need to summarize other views.

Provide answers Consider the questions readers will have—and answer them.

Offer anecdotes Personal stories help make your point.

Present solutions Always close with recommendations for solutions.

Get it done while the news is fresh Complete your piece in one or two days.

You know best Use your area of expertise to comment on current news.

Different is good Humor, unexpected perspectives and quirky approaches are refreshing.

Professor of Political Science and Director of the Rohatyn Center for International Affairs Allison Stanger submitted an opinion piece to the **New York Times** in the fall of 2007, when the issues surrounding armed contractors in Iraq were becoming a major news presence. The piece, titled “Foreign Policy, Privatized,” featured charts and graphics that illustrated her message and further engaged the readers in what was becoming a very topical news story.

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As May 2006 approached, Professor of Physics Frank Winkler wanted to commemorate an important milestone in his field. He wrote an opinion piece titled “Stardust Memories” about the 1,000-year anniversary of the sudden appearance of a star that is part of the southern constellation Lupus, the wolf. The piece was fun, educational, and written in a personable style, and the **New York Times** jumped at the chance to print it.

When the Media Call



WHEN THE MEDIA ARE LOOKING FOR A COMMENT regarding a news story they are working on, they tend to call our office first and then we connect them with you. Sometimes, though, they will contact you directly.

Typically, you will spend 15–30 minutes with an interviewer and perhaps only one quote (or none) will make it into the story. Don't get discouraged. If you are helpful and articulate, they will call again.

Here are some tips to consider when and if the media call

- ① IF YOU ARE COMFORTABLE WITH THE TOPIC and feel prepared to answer the questions, go ahead and do the interview.
- ② IF YOU THINK SOME PREPARATION WOULD BE HELPFUL, tell the reporter you need a few moments and that you will call back. (BUT don't wait too long; they are deadline driven.)
- ③ FEEL FREE TO ASK FOR SAMPLE QUESTIONS so you can begin to formulate some answers.
- ④ FEEL FREE TO ASK WHO ELSE IS BEING INTERVIEWED, to give you some context.
- ⑤ BE SURE TO ASK HOW THE INTERVIEW WILL BE USED—online, in print, etc.
- ⑥ AVOID SAYING “NO COMMENT” since it can imply you are hiding something. You can always ask to “get back to you on that.”
- ⑦ DON'T SPECULATE! You know you are heading that way if your sentence begins anything like “If...” or “I suppose.” It's not uncommon for reporters to ask these kinds of questions, and it's always okay for you to say, “I can't speculate on that.”

- ⑧ THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS “OFF THE RECORD.” It may sound good on TV, but if it leaves your lips during, before or after an interview—i.e., in front of the reporter at any time—it's definitely usable in the story.
- ⑨ KEEP THE INTERVIEW ON TRACK. Feel free to restate your comments so as not to stray.
- ①⑩ DON'T BE AFRAID TO PAUSE and take your time.
- ①① BE SURE TO ASK THE REPORTER'S NAME, affiliation, and phone number, in case you want to clarify something later.
- ①② IF A REPORTER INTERVIEWS YOU on camera, choose a place that feels comfortable and neutral. Take a look around and ask yourself what the reporter will see.
- ①③ ALERT PUBLIC AFFAIRS before (if possible) and after the interview takes place so we can do the necessary follow-up.

And, as always, please don't hesitate to stop or postpone the interview at any time and call Public Affairs for assistance. We often know something about the reporter and/or developing story and may have useful background information. We can talk you through potential questions and help develop your responses into quotable statements or sound bites. We have a great “Message Box” tool we use that many have found to be very useful in staying on topic and avoiding troublesome areas.

Be An Expert

“Faculty Experts” (see www.middlebury.edu/about/pubaff/facultyexperts) is an up-to-date, searchable resource that our office provides to reporters, producers, and others in the media.

We often revise the list depending on the topics that dominate the news, and we are always looking for willing participants who feel their areas of expertise are newsworthy.

We also have an on-site dedicated ISDN line and broadcast-quality recording space, called the “Whisper Room,” available in our offices, and we often use it to record both live and taped radio interviews.

If this is something you are interested in doing as a regular contact for the media, please let us know.

• When **New York Times** veteran reporter
• Alan Finder needed a quote for a story he
• was writing about the current demographic
• of college-bound high schoolers, he knew
• he could count on Dean of Admissions Bob
• Clagett. Finder had often contacted our office
• in the past and knew Bob was responsive and
• articulate—just what he needed in a pinch. The
• article, titled “Math Suggests College Frenzy
• Will Soon Ease,” ran on page one the next day.



Contact



WE ARE HERE TO HELP. We welcome tips. If you think something you are doing professionally or personally is newsworthy, call or e-mail us to discuss it. Or stop by our offices at 5 Court Street!

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