

# **Working with the Marketing and Communications Department**

## **Why bring information about your event and other news to the Marketing and Communications department?**

The Marketing and Communications department (M & C) is on the lookout for campus news. If you're hosting an event M&C can produce **media releases**, to attract more participants, inform the community, and build support. A college issued media release invites outside interest in the college's good work. Let M & C staff know the details so we can anticipate possible questions before we send one out.

We can use your information to promote **feature stories** or to get **briefs, calendar notes, or public service announcements (PSAs)** in newspapers and on websites, radio, and television stations.

We publish News & Events online, a convenient way to inform the HCC community, media on our distribution lists, and anyone who visits the HCC website, including media contacts, legislators, community partners, and parents.

## **Whom do you contact?**

JoAnne Rome, e-communications manager (413) 552-2183 [jrome@hcc.edu](mailto:jrome@hcc.edu) or Anne Sroka, director of marketing and communications (413) 552-2259 [asroka@hcc.edu](mailto:asroka@hcc.edu)

## **When should you bring M & C your information?**

As soon as possible, but no later than two weeks before a scheduled event or its registration deadline, if applicable. It's never too early; in addition to issuing a media release, we can include your news in appropriate publications, which may have early deadlines.

## **Why do we need so much advance time?**

We are daily deluged with requests from all parts of the college for publicity as well as calls from the media. Weekly publications require our submissions as long as three weeks in advance—some even longer. Also, advance warning allows us time to promote events in other arenas.

## **What information does M & C need?**

Our **Publicity Request Form** walks you through the most common questions we have regarding your news or event.

## Publicity Request Forms

### Publicity Request Forms are available:

In DON101, outside the JoAnne Rome's office; on the website; or by request from asroka@hcc.edu or jrome@hcc.edu.

We are also developing a written style guide and graphic standards guidelines, which gives tips on how to format your information for publication. These will be made available on the website in spring 2010.

### What are your media options?

Following are the options that our department uses to publicize events and stories:

- **Media Release**

A media release is a one-page invitation to the media to ask questions. Those questions could lead to a fairly small (but very helpful) news brief/calendar item or they could lead to a much longer (and more noticeable) hard news or feature story.

Whatever their ultimate goal, press releases must put some information out there fairly quickly. Within the first two paragraphs, they must tell the reader everything that **MUST** be known. For instance: who's speaking, who's invited, who's eligible, what's happening, when it is happening, is there a registration deadline, where is it happening, how much does it cost, etc.

Beyond the first two paragraphs, the press release *may* convince an assignment editor that your story is worth covering as a feature story or as a hard news story. For this reason, we may put in a quote, biographical tidbits, some interesting background information. We will refrain from going any longer than one page because the second page may get lost in a busy newsroom.

To help us write your release, please fill in the Publicity Request Form and be available to answer any follow-up questions we may have.

- **Feature story**

When the Marketing and Communications department hears of a good story opportunity, we might call a reporter and pitch it directly. Our first indication of an interesting story is the Publicity Request Form. In addition to calling the reporters/editors/news producers, we may also want to email them a quick note with back-up information. Hence, we need the Publicity Request Form.

On occasion, M & C will write a feature story for one of the weekly or daily papers. These papers are under no obligation to print our stories, but they often do. If you fill out a Publicity Request Form, the staff will proceed from there. We will likely need to do some interviews and we will ask participants to sign model release forms so that all photos are available for publication.

M & C will also write limited feature/news stories for the news and events section of the website and other college publications.

- **Public Service Announcements (PSA)**  
Public Service announcements (PSAs) are brief (30 or fewer word) news items sent to local radio stations. Anything longer will not be read on the air. Because radio stations are in the business of *selling* airtime (ads) PSAs must provide clear public benefit. We interpret this strictly, meaning clear public benefit at no cost to participants and having no direct benefit to the institution.
- **Cable Calendar Listings**  
Local television and cable access channels offer "community calendars" or bulletin boards as a community service listing items of interest. Copy for these is similar to a PSA: short and to the point. Cable stations are often lightly staffed or run with the help of volunteers, and need a lot of lead time—at least two weeks. M & C needs to have your information prior to that (4-6 weeks is ideal). Cable stations are not required to air the listings we send them, but often do when submitted well enough in advance.
- **Radio/Cable appearances**  
Local news directors and program directors are hungry for local news. Their shows are often a question & answer format, where you, as the guest, will be given a chance to answer questions about some aspect of your work or your program's mission. Sometimes, viewers/listeners get to call in and ask questions.  
  
If there is a program on which you think you or some other HCC representative should be a guest, please let the Marketing and Public Relations staff know. We will pitch the story to the appropriate station employee and work with you to finesse your message.
- **HCC's news and events web page**  
News and events are produced and published on the college website. It's a great way to highlight stories about HCC—a visit from high-profile alumnus/a, an exciting new class offering, the hiring of a new staff member.

## **What kinds of stories is M & C looking for?**

The *good* news is: HCC is teeming with good story ideas. The *bad* news is: HCC is teeming with good story ideas. When the Marketing and Communications department prioritizes publicity requests, we first look to see how the potential story supports one or more of HCC's four brand drivers:

- University-caliber education;
- Innovative, creative instruction;
- Comprehensive, individual support;
- Engaged and responsive community partner.

Identified by an extensive marketing research effort, these four areas reinforce what is unique about HCC. They underpin the college's "brand promise" which is "exceptional preparation for success." Story ideas that demonstrate these four qualities jump to the head of the list because they position HCC in a competitive educational marketplace.

## What makes a good story?

### All good stories share some things in common:

- Some sort of "**visual hook**" – an aspect of the story that can be photographed. The less staged, more engaging, the better (though some newspapers willing publish the conventional "check-passing" and "ribbon-cutting" photos if we submit them). If your story is about an art room practicum for early childhood educators, it's a great opportunity to take pictures of the kids playing with paint. Sometimes the newspapers/television can't send a reporter to cover the story, but they will send photographers/camera crews if the visuals sound interesting. Make sure that you secure proper permissions from participants before allowing them to be photographed or interviewed.
- **Interesting speakers/performers.** If you have a nationally-recognized speaker or a performer with an interesting history, get us that person's resume or provide us contact information. Let us know what makes that person famous, an expert, or otherwise newsworthy. Did they grow up in Western Mass? Do they sit on a lot of local boards? What major awards did s/he win? Don't assume that "everyone" knows this person already.

### And don't forget...

- **Correctly spelled names** – organizations, individuals, places, etc. are critical. If you submit a photo, please include the correctly spelled names of all people in the picture. Also provide a sentence telling us what's happening in the photo.
- **Location, location, location.** Let us know where your main speakers, award recipients, etc. *live* and/or *work*. This may sound unnecessarily nosey, but it's not. If a newspaper knows that some speaker, professor or award recipient lives or works in their readership area, they may make an effort to cover the story.

## Other Opportunities for Publicity

In addition to responding to publicity requests from the college community, M & C responds to media inquiries, produces advertising copy, and creates the college's major publications. These tasks require targeted, compelling copy—something that makes the reader sit up and listen. Do you know of a student, faculty, or staff member with a compelling story or expertise in a particular area? Tell us! We are always on the look out for testimonials, profiles, and experts that will elevate HCC's stature.

- **Testimonials** are short, first-person accounts of the HCC experience. These can be used in a variety of ways—from profiles in course bulletins to advertisements. Often, we will ask for a photo to accompany the testimonial. Please always make sure anyone solicited to give an HCC testimonial first sign a model release form so that we can use their likeness in ads, publications, etc.
- **Profiles** are longer feature pieces that focus on one person’s experience—as an HCC student, a staff member, an alumnus/a. They are longer than testimonials and written by someone other than the subject. M & C might write a profile for a college publication. Outside reporters like to produce profiles if the person is truly interesting in some way. If you know of someone who would make a good profile, please let us know who he or she is, why he or she is exciting, and how we can contact him or her. Also, make sure that he or she OKs being written about. We will need a signed model release form.
- **Experts.** On any given day, a reporter may call M & C staff to get an expert to comment on some news event or feature-type story. An HCC experts list enables us to address these requests quickly and credibly, promoting HCC’s wealth of intellectual capital via the media, and establishing a HCC as a good information source. Reporters remember sources who produce good material. We’d like them to remember HCC that way.

### **Developing an expert’s list**

This is not a simple matter of tapping the department heads to talk about their titular areas of expertise—often a good idea not the only way to go about it. Perhaps you are a business professor at HCC but, outside work, you have written a book about organic gardening or have started an organic gardening cooperative. When a story about genetically engineered vegetables hits the national wires, HCC might get a call asking if there’s anyone here who can comment on it. That person can be you.

*Or*, you might have done specialized research within your field of study: you are a literature professor who generally teaches freshmen writing at HCC, but you have also done extensive work on Middle English writing. When a Middle English text is discovered in the basement of the Granby Public Works Department, we get a call from the media and....

### **Talking to reporters**

A media release can generate an interview request from a reporter. M & C staff fields some requests, but prefer to send them to you—the expert.

Sometimes, the press skips us and calls you directly. If so, we ask you to call us as soon as the press calls. If nothing else, we will be able to better track the story if we know it’s coming. At the very worst, we can let you know if there might be a particular motive behind the reporter’s call.

**When speaking to the press, please keep the following in mind:**

- If the Marketing and Communications department has referred a member of the press to you, please return the reporter's call promptly. Reporters work on deadlines. If they have to wait more than a few hours, they might find another (non-HCC) source to quote. If you think you will not be able to return a reporter's call, call M & C so we can line up another interview.
- If you know a press call is coming, be prepared. Have background information ready and decline to immediately answer a question if you need to get additional information. If you *say* you are looking something up, please do so, and then call the reporter back with the answer.
- Never exaggerate the facts. It will come back to haunt you.
- Avoid saying, "no comment." Instead, say "I don't know," or "I'll have to get back to you on that." If you say you'll get back to the reporter, please do so.
- Never release student names, class schedules, or addresses. Please contact M & C if you wish to put a reporter in touch with a student. It is very important to have the student's permission in advance.
- Never release home telephone numbers, fax numbers, or addresses of students or college employees.
- If you have been asked to be a guest on a local TV or radio show, you might be nervous about making some sort of on-air faux pas. Do not panic. M & C staff is happy to help prepare you. Also, remember that not all publicity is good publicity. If you—or we—determine that a television, radio, or newspaper offer is bound to bring controversy or is just not worth the tension it's causing you, you don't have to do it.