

# Mount Vernon Nazarene University Media Policy

## Communications Office

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Effective communication with the media is critical to MVNU's ability to carry out its mission and promote continued support for the University. Effective media relations best serve the University by:

- Informing the public of what we can do for them
- Promoting MVNU's achievements, activities, and events of significance
- Expanding the general visibility and awareness of the University
- Ensuring that accurate information is conveyed to the public regarding incidents and issues of a controversial and/or sensitive nature

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### **Policy**

The Vice President for University Advancement serves as the official university spokesperson and conveys the official University position on issues of general university-wide impact or significance or situations that are of a particularly controversial or sensitive nature. Inquiries from the media about such issues should be referred to the Director of Communications.

Depending on the specific circumstances, MVNU's President, Vice President, and Executive Director of Marketing may decide to designate another University administrator to serve as spokesperson on a particular issue.

In cases of critical significance to MVNU, the Executive Director of Marketing and Director of Communications will work with other University officials to develop official "messaging" to detail the known facts of the situation and summarize MVNU's position.

In the event of a crisis or emergency situation, the Director of Communications will coordinate the information flow from the University to the public. In such situations, all campus departments should refer any calls from the media to the Communications Office.

If the Director of Communications is unavailable, back-up communications for the main campus are handled by the Assistant Director of Communications (see Contact Information). This individual also handles all media communications for Adult and Graduate Studies.

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## General Procedures For Dealing With The Media

Members of the faculty and staff are free to respond to requests from the media regarding their research, scholarship, teaching or professional expertise. In such cases, the Director of Communications should be notified as soon as possible to inform him/her of the contact, as well as your School's Dean (if you are a faculty member). Such notification can be particularly important if follow-up inquiries are made with other University personnel to ensure a coordinated, consistent University response.

Media inquiries should be referred to the Director of Communications if they involve issues with University-wide significance and/or are of a controversial or sensitive nature. Director of Communications will then work with the Executive Director of Marketing and the Vice President of University Advancement for appropriate action.

Guidelines for communicating with the media when the issue is non-controversial and limited to the faculty/staff member's area of expertise:

- Obtain the name of the person calling, the media organization and, if available, the anticipated time/date of release of information in print or broadcast. This information should be included when the notification is made to the Communications Office.
- The best approach with the media is to be prompt, helpful, and honest. All contacts from the media should be returned as soon as possible, in deference to reporters' deadlines. At the most, a call should be returned within a half-day. If that is not possible, an alternate employee (if appropriate) or the Director of Communications should be asked to handle the call.
- Make sure you understand each question from the media before answering. If you cannot answer the question, or are uncomfortable providing a response, take the reporter's number and advise him/her that someone who can provide the information will contact him/her as soon as possible. Then, follow-up by contacting the appropriate University official AND the Director of Communications.
- Do not offer speculations or gossip. Do **NOT** answer a reporter's question with "no comment." Do not be condescending or underestimate the reporter's intelligence, but do make sure the reporter understands your responses. Provide your phone number and/or e-mail address for follow-up questions.
- Remember that in responding to the media, you can be seen as representing and speaking for the University. Personal opinions should be clearly and carefully identified as such.
- Issues that should not be discussed with reporters are 1.) legal issues, 2.) personnel issues, 3.) questions that involve University integrity, such as ethics or issues that may result in harm to others, or 4.) a campus crisis or emergency. Refer all such inquiries to the Director of Communications.
- Any media inquiries that involve information about specific students should be directed to the Dean of Student Development. Such inquiries will be handled in strict compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This federal law protects the confidentiality of a student's education record and some personal information. Information that may be given includes information found in a directory: the student's full name,

campus address and phone number, dates of attendance and degrees, honors and certificates received, class level (e.g. freshman), and academic major(s). Grades may only be provided to the media if a student wishes to release the information in connection with an award or scholarship (check with the Director of Communications to find out if student has given such permission).

- Any media inquiries regarding MVNU faculty or staff should be referred to the Human Resources Office and the Director of Communications. Only public information may be provided without the employee's written approval. Public information includes the following: verification of employment, name of job title/position, full- or part-time status, name of department, campus address and phone number, and employment starting date.

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## Campus Emergency / Crisis

Crisis communications have a lasting impact on institutional reputation and constituent support. How well we convey our message to the public greatly depends on what is reported to the news media. This is especially true in a crisis, during which the news media is the primary means of communication to our constituencies. Because of the emotions that usually accompany crises, images formed from crisis reporting are especially important in shaping long-lasting public impressions of the institution.

In the event of a major crisis on campus, it is essential that an effective communications plan be put into effect to disseminate timely, accurate information and to ensure that inquiries are routed to the appropriate sources.

The Director of Communications, under the direction of the Vice President of University Advancement and the Executive Director of Marketing, is responsible for the development and dissemination of *most* University communications in the event of a campus emergency. This includes coordination of internal communications with students, faculty, and staff, as well as communications with the media. The priority will be on maintaining timely and open communications with the media, providing complete and accurate information that has been confirmed about the emergency situation and MVNU's response to the crisis at hand. Communications with the media will be frequent throughout the duration of the emergency situation. The MVNU Web site and e-mail system will be utilized as a key medium for updating our campus community and the public on the details of the emergency situation and actions we are taking to address all related issues.

A **Media Center** will be established in room 133 (the round room) of the Free Enterprise Business Center in the event of a widespread campus incident/disaster. The media center will include workspace for media personnel, electricity, telephones, Internet connections, campus and community directories and maps.

In a campus emergency faculty, staff and students have a right **NOT** to speak with the media. The media has access only to the public areas, no residence halls, apartment units, or private offices. Any situations where individuals feel a reporter has abused their rights should be reported to the Director of Communications.

A phone bank may also be established, if a high volume of incoming phone calls are expected.

For more complete information on crisis communications, please view the full Crisis Communications Guide online at: <http://nvr.mvnu.edu/dept/comm/>

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## Reporting Contact with Media

In order to make the sharing of media information more convenient, the Communications Office has created two self-guiding pages on the Web where users may submit media reports. The first is a **Media Contact Report**. This form allows the user to share the details about any media contact that has already occurred.

The second page is a **Press Release Form**. This form allows the user to share the details of upcoming events or positive, newsworthy stories with the Communications Office.

Submitting either report sends an e-mail directly to the Director of Communications. Both forms are available at: <http://nvr.mvnu.edu/dept/comm/>

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## Contact Information

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