“And this one is for not giving out stupid interviews.”
R-Comm

What We Do: Strategic Messaging

• R-Comm is the communications office for Rutgers-New Brunswick and RBHS.
• Our goal is to enhance Rutgers’ reputation as a leading national research university and academic health care system.
• Our team provides a range of external and internal communications services, including media relations, which provides information to the public through the news media in a timely, accurate, substantive and thorough manner.
• Media relations includes pro-actively promoting faculty research and experts, administrative initiatives, student accomplishments and more; responding to media inquiries; managing issues/crisis communications; and helping RU-NB and RBHS school communicators to promote their schools.

Storytelling with a Purpose: How We Promote Your Work

• Media outreach: news releases, expert advisories, op-eds, personalized pitches, relationship-building
• Meltwater (online media database, monitoring and analytics service)
• EurekAlert! (AAAS’s online science news service)
• Newswise (online news service for universities and journalists)
• Rutgers Today
• Media training: R-Comm provides individual and group training
• Broadcast studios: Rutgers has TV and radio studios for remote live and taped interviews
The digital revolution has transformed the news media industry, which failed to adapt its business model in a timely and effective way, especially newspapers, resulting in drastically shrinking traditional newsrooms but rising employment in smaller and specialized digital-native media sites.

This changing landscape means there are more publications, articles and micro-influencers, (including journalism generated by artificial intelligence), but fewer reporters in most newsrooms and fewer specialized reporters with in-depth knowledge about their beats – all working in multiple platforms in an accelerated 24/7 news cycle.

Media training, however, remains important because the news media continue to play a key role in shaping the University’s reputation – and yours.
Introduction: Why Talk to the Media?

• Rutgers has a responsibility to inform the public about its mission and its work in an accurate, thorough, timely and transparent way.
• Media coverage is essential to the public’s understanding of Rutgers’ value to the state, nation and world as a comprehensive public research university.
• News coverage can strengthen Rutgers’ (and your) reputation with key audiences, including current and prospective students, faculty and staff, funders, alumni, taxpayers, patients, legislators, policymakers and others.
• Media training helps faculty, administrators and others to anticipate questions, avoid common traps and confidently and effectively deliver their message.
• Rutgers uses a variety of strategies, tactics and platforms to enhance its reputation, including news coverage, which provides third-person credibility that other forms of communications may not.
The Secret is ...

Media training can seem difficult, involving extensive workshops, videos, rules and consultants, but too often it is overdone. Yes, specialized training is necessary in some situations, but the vast majority of the time, the secret is ... there is no secret.

Anyone can do it well with a little preparation and practice.

Remember, talking to the media is like learning to swim or ride a bike. After a few tries, what initially seemed scary becomes easy.
**Takeaways**

*Complex issues often don’t lend themselves to sound bite answers, but communicating simply about complicated issues can be done*

1. **Preparation:** Practice 2-3 talking points you want your audience to receive.
2. **Plain English:** Speak plainly and concisely. You’re not trying to impress fellow academics. You’re helping the public understand an issue, why it matters and what you and Rutgers are doing about it.
3. **Control:** You’re in control of the interview, which isn’t so much a conversation as an opportunity to deliver a message. Remember, reporters come to you because you’re an expert in your field, so relax and breathe.
Getting Started

• If a story involves a sensitive or controversial issue, immediately contact R-Comm.
• When a reporter contacts you, ask their name, news outlet, the topic and deadline.
• Take a moment to decide whether to do the interview, but the sooner you decide the better – sources interviewed early typically have greater influence than those interviewed just before deadline when the story is largely completed.
• If you decide to do the interview, let the reporter know when you’ll be available. If you decide not to do the interview, let the reporter know as a courtesy.
• Prepare talking/message points (see next slide).
• Take a moment to Google the reporter’s recent stories to see how – and whether -- they have covered the issue they are asking about. A reporter doing a science story, for example, may not have a science background.
• If the story involves breaking news, review the latest coverage so you’re up to date.
Talking/Message Points

- Prepare 2-3 talking points that convey in simple terms the key message you want the reporter – and, more importantly, your audience -- to come away with.
- Prepare a sound bite that summarizes your main message.
- Speak plainly and concisely. How would you discuss your work with a friend, a neighbor or your grandmother?
- Your talking points should be short, declarative sentences. That’s not dumbing it down. Being concise is harder than being wordy. Mark Twain once said to a friend: “I’m sorry I wrote you a long letter. I didn’t have time to write a short letter.”
- Use real terms, specifics and anecdotes that people can relate to, not jargon, abstractions and technical data.
- Practice your talking points and sound bite out loud. Practice with your smartphone to get accustomed to seeing and hearing yourself on video/audio.
- If the interview involves your new research findings, be prepared to answer three basic questions in a few simple sentences: What did you study? What are your major findings? Why does it matter?
The Interview

*Listen carefully and sound conversational, but an interview isn’t a conversation. It’s an opportunity to deliver your key messages to the audience*

- Be polite, friendly, genuine. Reporters aren’t your friend, but they’re not your enemy.
- Stick to your talking/message points and what you know. The reporter probably won’t ask the “perfect question” for you to deliver your talking points, so find the opportunity to do it.
- Reporters may have a preconceived idea of the story, but don’t ask them “What’s your angle?” Rather, you can ask: “Can you tell me more about the story you’re working on?” Keep this question open-ended and stay quiet while the reporter speaks. Also, ask who else they’re interviewing.
- Don’t ignore questions you don’t like or you’ll come across as phony or worse. Instead, acknowledge the question briefly, then steer the conversation back to your talking points with bridging phrases, such as: “I think the real issue is...” or “I think what’s most important to know is...”
- If you don’t know an answer, just say so. Don’t speculate or address hypothetical situations. If possible, direct them to another expert, even one not at your institution.
- Don’t try to speak perfectly; unless it’s a live interview, your answers will be edited.
- Don’t feel obligated to keep talking to fill periods of silence. Reporters sometimes pause in an effort to get you to say more than you wish.
- Don’t ask to see a reporter’s story before it runs, but if you’re concerned about accuracy, offer to fact-check any complicated parts and ask them to repeat back your quotes and any points you’re concerned about. Sometimes they’ll do it, sometimes they won’t.
The Interview

• Turn off your phone. Put a “Do Not Disturb” sign on your door. And put away the cat.
• Never lie to or mislead a reporter. Your credibility is your greatest asset.
• Never go off the record (except in unusual circumstances) even if a reporter promises confidentiality.
• The mic is always “hot.” So is the camera. So is the phone. Everything you say, write or do may appear in the news, not just when the interview starts and stops.
• Relax, but not too much. Remember, Connie Chung’s “Just between you and me”?
• Never say no comment. It sounds as if you’re hiding something.
• Don’t repeat the negative if a reporter asks a loaded or negative question. Remember, reporter: Are you a crook? Nixon: “I am not a crook.” Or former U.S. Senate candidate Christine O’Donnell: “I am not a witch”? Always try to frame your answers in the positive.
• As a general rule, the tougher a question is, the shorter your answer should be. And it should never be: “I’m eating a cookie.”
• If a reporter is unprofessional, you can end the interview by simply saying: “I’m not comfortable talking to you about this issue any longer.”
• Corrections: If you make a misstatement, correct it before the interview ends. If a story runs with an error – yours or the reporter’s -- immediately request a correction or clarification, so the error is not picked up by other media and repeated in subsequent stories. R-Comm can help with this.
Television

• Use a little make-up to take the shine off your face.
• Clothing: wear mostly solid colors, not white, black, stripes or plaid.
• Find a comfortable position and don’t fidget. Lean forward slightly into the camera. Smile slightly as you listen. Avoid big gestures, but move your head, body and hands slightly as people do in real life.
• In in-person interviews, look at the reporter, not the camera. In remote interviews, talk to the video screen or camera as if it’s a person.
• In remote interviews, you can’t always be certain when the camera is on you, other guests or the questioner, so assume at all times that the camera is on you – and live.
• Get to the point. You have less than 10 seconds to make your point in TV interviews, a little longer in radio interviews and a little longer in print interviews. But always speak concisely.
• Try to avoid fillers -- the “ahs” and “ums” we all use when searching for the right words. The best way to do this is to pause and think about your answer before giving it. If the interview is taped -- and most TV interviews are -- your pauses will be edited out.
Data vs. Values

Messages need to be informational but also meaningful at the human level to motivate people. For example:

- **Pure data**: “The EPA today announced a plan to reduce by 70 percent nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide and mercury in our air. The program, known as ‘Clear Skies,’ will eliminate in excess of 35 million more tons of those pollutants than will be eliminated under the current Clean Air Act.”

- **Values**: “The EPA today announced a plan to address chronic respiratory illness in children, the elderly and other vulnerable Americans by vastly reducing three dangerous pollutants in the air we breathe at a rate far greater than under current law.”
The Interview

• Here’s an example of an effective on-camera interview by a faculty member.
• Here are examples of how not to do it.
• Remember, media interviews aren’t just one-offs. They’re opportunities to build long-term relationships with journalists and to increase the chances that they – and other media – will come to you for future stories.
Coronavirus Test Results Are Faster but Still Too Slow for Contact Tracing, National Survey Says

The average test times for coronavirus results have fallen from four days in April to 2.7 days in September, but results are still too slow for effective contact tracing, according to a new nationwide survey led by researchers from Rutgers University-New Brunswick and Northeastern, Harvard and Northwestern Universities.

The survey was published by The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public’s Policy Preferences Across States.

“Despite decreased average wait times, a substantial proportion of Americans still endure long waits,” said co-author Katherine Ognianova, an assistant professor of communication at Rutgers' School of Communication and Information.

The survey finds considerable disparities in test times. Black respondents wait almost an entire day more than white respondents for their test results (4.4 days versus 3.5 days on average). The average Hispanic respondent waits 4.1 days. White and Asian American respondents wait an average of 3.5 and 3.6 days, respectively, for their results.

Only 56 percent of respondents who received a positive coronavirus test say they were contacted for contact tracing. Of those who were contacted, 37 percent say they were contacted by their state government, 28 percent by their local government, 25 percent by the hospital and 8 percent by a non-profit organization.

Thirty-five percent of respondents had to wait at least three days between the decision to get a test and receiving the test. The average person waits 6.2 days between seeking a test and receiving results.

“ Delivering results is just one part of the testing process. Many Americans face difficulties accessing tests in the first place,” said Ognianova.
WATCH: Rutgers professor on disparities in COVID-19 test wait times

BRIANA VANNENZI, ANCHOR | OCTOBER 23, 2020 | CORONAVIRUS IN NJ

It still takes too long to get results, and differences in wait times nationwide can put some communities at risk.

New Jerseyans are following public health guidelines less vigilantly now than when the coronavirus pandemic began last spring though there was an uptick in adherence to public health advice during the winter surge, according to a study done by researchers at Rutgers University and other universities.

Researchers said a more relaxed attitude toward behaviors that slow the spread of COVID-19 could come at a cost. Even though a growing number of people are getting vaccinated, new and more virulent strains of the virus have emerged and could lead to another spike in infections.

“We’re still hoping that people won’t relax too much, because we’re still not out of the woods,” said Katherine Ognyanova, a Rutgers University communication professor and the study’s lead author. “Hopefully, people will stay a little bit more careful for just a little bit longer.”

The study was done by the COVID States Project, a group of researchers studying

At an early afternoon news conference, Gov. Murphy said that some of the coronavirus numbers keep creeping up, in a grim pattern.

“The worst has been worse than we had imagined,” the governor said, as he reported that the number of New Jersey residents in the hospital is 3,287. It was the highest number since May 20, and was the fourth straight day of a rise in cases. There were also 56 newly reported deaths.

The figure came in spite of news from authors of a recently released report from the Covid States Project, a group of researchers from Rutgers, Northeastern, Harvard and Northwestern Universities. The group has monitored about 20,000 people nationwide since April, to see how they’re coping with the viral threat.

Researchers found that New Jersey has a stronger rate of compliance than most states.

Dr. Katherine Ognyanova is a Rutgers professor who’s part of the project. For New Jersey specifically, she said that they found high compliance.

“All the New Jersey numbers are actually higher than the national average,” Ognyanova said in a Zoom interview.

She said that the Garden State is one of the Top 15 states for compliance. However, she added, “even here, where we started really well, where about nine in 10 people were doing what they should in the spring, now it’s closer to six in 10.”
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Parler Offline: Rutgers Misinformation Expert Available to Discuss

New Brunswick, N.J. (Jan. 11, 2020) – Rutgers’ Britt Paris, a critical informatics scholar who tracks misinformation campaigns, is available to comment on Parler, its recent ban on Amazon, Apple and Google, and its possible role in the U.S. Capitol breach.

“Amazon Web Services, Apple and Google's refusing service to Parler is an example of corporate denial of service,” said Paris. “This is legal and protected under the First Amendment. Everyone up in arms about this must note there are endless platforms for Parler users to engage in non-violent discourse. The president has what is essentially a news station and an entire press team in his house. Just because a bunch of restaurants and maybe a restaurant vendor or two has refused you service doesn’t mean you don’t have other ways to feed yourself.”

“Thanks to a massive legal data scrape of Parler’s insecure platform, we are still learning the extent the platform was used by insurrectionists to plan and execute the Jan. 6th breach of the Capitol. As Capitol metadata specialists and independent security researchers access these troves of scraped messages – which include messages deleted in the aftermath of Jan. 6th – we will see a clearer picture of the role Parler played in the attack. In recent months, Parler has become the go-to platform for those who feel that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube exhibit anti-conservative tendencies despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. There has been an uptick in Parler use since Jan. 6th as Trump's and other accounts continuing to spread conspiracy and encouraging violent insurrection have been banned from the major platforms. Now, as Parler is no longer able to host on Amazon’s servers, they must rebuild from the bottom up according to Parler’s CEO, Jeff Matze. They’ve told users it may be a week until the site is functional. While it is legal and overall beneficial for corporations like Amazon to attempt to mitigate the spread of messages encouraging violence and death in the name of white supremacy, there are larger questions to be asked about how it has become the responsibility of corporations to control the public sphere, and what we might do to ameliorate this situation in ways that meaningfully benefit the public interest.”

Paris is an assistant professor of library and information science at Rutgers University—New Brunswick’s School of Communication and Information.

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R-Comm  Grounded in strategy. Ready for anything.
Racial identity is often a key heuristic that helps people interpret facts, says Britt Paris, an assistant professor of library and information science at Rutgers University.

- "A lot of time, the way people interpret things has more to do with pre-existing beliefs and backgrounds — the ways they were taught to critically analyze and interpret information — than necessarily looking for facts or evidence," she says.

- "Humans’ natural tendency is to split up into groups, tribes of people who usually look and act like you, and try our best to outcompete other groups, often

“We are still learning the extent the platform was used by insurrectionists to plan and execute the Jan. 6th breach of the Capitol,” Britt Paris, a critical informatics scholar and associate professor at Rutgers University who tracks misinformation campaigns, said in a statement.

“As Capitol metadata specialists and independent security researchers access these troves of scraped messages — which include messages deleted in the aftermath of Jan. 6th — we will see a clearer picture of the role Parler played in the attack,” Paris said.

A group of activist hackers also salvaged much of what happened on Parler before it went offline and plan to put it in a public archive, the Associated Press reported.
Rutgers Expert Explains QAnon

The right-wing conspiracy movement known as QAnon is at the forefront of national and political conversations this election cycle, believing that President Trump is secretly fighting the deep state.

Jack Bratich, an associate professor of journalism and media studies at Rutgers’ School of Communication and Information, says the movement, which has recently been taken down by Facebook and Twitter, has gained momentum because of recent economic, political and ecological turmoil.

The author of *Conspiracy Panics: Political Rationality and Popular Culture* describes QAnon, why it’s well known and why we should not treat this as a misinformation problem.

What is QAnon?

QAnon, as I consider it to be, is an internet-based social movement with religious underpinnings.

It’s a collective project of interpretation and action around an alleged military insider who provides clues and cryptic messages about political affairs. It started as an internet political speculation game (interpreting signs, greeting each other with codes) and morphed into an increasingly apocalyptic movement.

QAnon connects many long-standing tendencies and conspiracy claims. Even if these claims have been around for some time, many have gained newfound circulation as more people “discover” their existence through the internet. The core claim is that an elite cabal has corrupted America and that cabal is in league with Satan. There’s a small secret group in the U.S. military ready to expose and fight it with the blessing of President Trump. Other theories can be hung on this main thread such as Pizzagate, coronavirus is fake, vaccinations do more harm than good and JFK Jr. is alive.

What are the reasons for its relative success now?

People are feeling this heightened uncertainty and seeking a stable future. QAnon gives them clear enemies, a secure future based on an unfolding “plan,” a meaningful story of triumphing over evil and a way to participate in its implementation. 2020 has provided two main events for
"QAnon is really invested in this thing called the plan, and they have to trust the plan. And that's a faith-based moment. Prophecies can can be given. They can also fail. And so the failure of the prophecy doesn't mean the failure of the entire movement. It means regather and figure out the next thing so the goalposts keep shifting," said Jack Bratich, Associate Professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Rutgers University, and author of "Conspiracy Panics: Political Rationality and Popular Culture.

It's difficult to predict exactly what might happen to the QAnon theory, but there are a few possible pathways for followers.

"For the hard core, this is just as even Trump himself has said, this is the beginning. They will continue to follow him. They will continue to see him as their leader," said Bratich.

"He's obviously a very memorable figure, I think deliberately so," said Jack Bratich of Rutgers University. QAnon derives from a mysterious online figure, who alleges that a cabal of Democrats and Hollywood insiders are involved in child sex traffic, Satin worship and cannibalism. Trump was supposed to bring an end to it.

"This has been a long time in the works, and it's hard to figure out what needs to break to ... put the things that we've unleashed over time (back in the bottle), to calm those things down a bit and see if there's a way to create a common ground again," said Jack Bratich, a journalism and media studies professor at Rutgers University.

"It's not going to happen anytime that soon," he said. "There are more days to come before Jan. 20 and beyond. And if people don't think Biden is their presider we're in a different kind of zone."

Where do we go from here?
Support from SC&I Mar Comm

• Oftentimes, a reporter will reach out to SC&I’s Mar Comm team directly, and we will contact relevant faculty for the pitch
• If a reporter reaches out to you directly, let SC&I’s Mar Comm know so we can support
• Extremely important to keep keywords on the “In the Media” page updated
• We can assist pitching your research proactively (Meltwater and social media)
Questions?