

## Appendix G.

### When a Reporter Calls.....

- *Respect reporters' deadlines.* Return calls promptly, even if it is to decline an interview. In many cases, reporters need a response in minutes, not hours or days.
- *Obtain the reporter's name and publication or broadcast station* and ask exactly how you can help him or her.
- *Never go "off the record".* Always assume that what you tell a reporter will be quoted and on the record.
- *Try to see a reporter in person* rather than talking over the phone. Distance and deadlines frequently make this impossible, but face-to face communication is preferable, particularly when discussing complex material that requires in-depth explanation.
- *Unprepared?* Tell the reporter you will call back in a few minutes. Collect your thoughts and then follow through on your promise to provide an interview.
- *Have a message.* A news story can convey, at most, two or three points effectively. Prepare a single communications objective and two or three secondary points you would like to make and then make them, regardless of the questions you are asked.
- *State your position in positive terms.* Conflict is news; the routine isn't. Reporters frequently frame questions to bring out the conflict in a story. Don't repeat negative words or phrases in the reporter's question. Don't fan controversy unintentionally.
- *Use simple language* rather than technical terms and speak in short sentences.
- *Be brief,* especially for broadcast media. Newspaper reporters can take more time in their interviews and present more information than can reporters from radio or television.
- *Anticipate tough questions* and formulate answers. If you are asked questions you prefer not to answer, address them briefly and bridge to what you want to say.
- *Avoid a "no comment" answer.* It suggests you are trying to hide something or evade the question, so explain why you cannot make a comment.

- *Don't expect to review a story before publication.* It conflicts with journalistic ethics and professionalism. If you fear that a point has not been understood, repeat the point or ask the reporter if you can clarify in any way. Encourage a follow-up phone call for further information or clarification if you sense that need.
- *If you're misquoted,* try to contact the reporter, not the editor. Don't overreact, especially if the error is minor or not quite the choice of words you would have used.
- *Be knowledgeable, sincere, compassionate, and energetic.* Audiences (especially television viewers) are won or lost by the attitudes of those interviewed.
- *Above all, be honest.* The truth can sometimes be painful, but lies are deadly. And if you don't know the answer to a question, say so.

Modified from the brochure, "The News Media and You: Guidelines for University of Wisconsin-Madison Faculty and Staff". University News and Information Service.