Talking to the Media

“You talkin' to me?”
-- Travis Bickle
THE SCIENCE NEWS CYCLE

Start Here

Your Research
Conclusion: A is correlated with B (p=0.56), given C, assuming D and under E conditions.

...is translated by...

UNIVERSITY PR OFFICE
(YES, YOU HAVE ONE)

For Immediate Release:
Scientists find potential link between A and B (under certain conditions).

...which is then picked up by...

NEWS WIRE ORGANIZATIONS
A causes B, say scientists.

...who are read by...

THE INTERNETS

Scientists out to kill us again,
POSTED BY RANDOM DUDE
Comments (377)
OMG! I knew it!!!
WTH???????

LOCAL EYEWITNESS NEWS

WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT "A"... CAN KILL YOU! MORE AT 11...

LOCAL EYEWITNESS NEWS

...eventually making it to...

LOCAL EYEWITNESS NEWS

...and caught on...

CNC Cable NEWS

We saw it on a Blog!
A causes B all the time
What will this mean for Obama?
BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS
The Mainstream Media

• National and International “print” media – NY Times, Wall Street Journal, Time, The Economist, Wired

• TV networks, NPR

• Local news media – Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Tribune-Review, Pittsburgh Business Times, Local network affiliates, NPR affiliate
Not-so-mainstream Media

- Internet outlets – CNET, ars technica, TechCrunch
- Blogs
- Social media – Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr
- Trade publications
- Campus websites, The Tartan, The Piper
Reaching reporters

- News releases – sent via email, newswire, Eurekalert.org, social media
- Website stories
- Responding to reporter queries
- Pitches directly to a reporter
  - Prominent, competitive news outlets
  - Reporters who have written about the subject
  - Reporters who have expressed interest in a subject
RESEARCH TOPICS GUARANTEED TO BE PICKED UP BY THE NEWS MEDIA

Chocolate! Anything that validates the public’s wishful thinking that chocolate is secretly good for you is news gold.

A chocolate lover reacts to news that her chocolate addiction is making her smarter and saving the environment.

ROBOTS!! Everyone loves robots. In fact, news outlets are required by law to feature a robot story every 7 days.

Roboticist demonstrates nose-picking robot, says will soon replace humans.

Unrealistic Sci-Fi Gadgets

Everyone is still waiting for their jetpacks, flying cars, and teleporters. Get on it, Science!

Engineers test latest invisibility cloak prototype.

Experiments That Might Blow Up The World

Nothing gets the crazies riled up like recreating conditions of the Big Bang in the only planet you have. Hope your math is right!

"Oops,” say scientists...
It’s a jungle out there
Make your story stand out

• Timeliness – Did this discovery just occur or just get published/presented? Is this subject in the news?
• Uniqueness – Has this reporter already written something like your story? If so, move on
• Impact – How does this affect the reader/viewer?
• Human interest, unusual characters
Contact: Now what?

- Have research paper available to distribute
- Photos
- Video
- Project website
- Related contacts
- Make yourself available for interviews
Talking to reporters

• Interviews are on the record. Don’t say anything you wouldn’t want repeated.

• Have two or three major points in mind. Make sure you make those points, regardless of what you are asked.

• Be attentive to the reporter’s audience. Is it general or technical? Choose your words and examples accordingly.
Still talking to reporters

• Who is the reporter? A beat reporter who specializes in your field? A general assignment reporter?

• Assume you will be asked stupid questions. Use them as opportunities to provide context, make your own points.

• Assume you will be asked tough questions. Be ready to defend, justify your work.
Is this over yet?

• Be honest
• Don’t guess
• Be conversational
• If on camera or audio recording (but good overall suggestions):
  – Speak slowly and clearly
  – Get to the point; air time is precious
Branding

• Mention the university during interviews, especially radio and TV interviews. “Our research group here at Carnegie Mellon University…”

• Consider wearing university apparel when meeting reporter

• Never wear apparel from another university or organization.
The facts are coming! The facts are coming!