ATTENTION!

If you are contacted by someone from the media, inform the COE Office of Communications immediately so that we can advise you. Media should not contact you without first going through our office. It is the job of the Office of Communications to track possible stories and to protect and promote College of Education faculty members.

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PREPARATION:

- Determine your message with three -- no more than five -- key points.
- Anticipate difficult questions.
- Gather facts, statistics or background information.
- Practice what you want to get across.
- For TV and still cameras, check your appearance; look your best; don’t wear flashy clothing or jewelry; conservative, comfortable clothes in solid colors or soft shades are best.
- For television interviews, don’t choose to sit in a chair that rocks or leans back. Sit forward or stand, using hand gestures naturally to help make your points. Maintain eye contact with the reporter. If you wear glasses, tip them forward a little so they don’t reflect light, and don’t wear the photosensitive type that turn dark in bright light.

DURING THE INTERVIEW:

- Honesty is the best policy. Answer truthfully, even if it hurts; do not lie or exaggerate the facts. To create a “nothing to hide” perception, be helpful and pleasant, and avoid being defensive or evasive.
- If you do not want a statement to be quoted, do not make it.
- Keep responses simple and avoid complex explanations. Don’t expect interviewers to be experts in your field. A reporter might ask the “dumb questions” the public or an editor will want to know.
- State important facts first.
- Make your key points. And don’t be afraid to ask the reporter to repeat the main points you’ve made to be certain he or she understands.
- Be brief, deliver responses in 20 seconds or less for print or broadcast; 10-second
sound bites are the building blocks of TV news stories. The likelihood of your being misquoted is reduced substantially if you speak briefly and clearly.

- Use examples, comparisons or statistics for follow-up questions. Use anecdotes and human interest examples to illustrate your points. Use humor if appropriate.
- Provide illustrations, visual aids or a demonstration if possible for photographers and videographers.
- **Don’t use jargon; speak in personal terms whenever possible.**
- If you do not know the answer to a question, admit it. Don’t guess. Offer to call back with the answer, or refer the reporter elsewhere.
- **Never speak “off the record.”** The comment may not be attributed to you, but the reporter may use it in the story to confirm information. The only thing truly “off the record” is what you don’t say; in fact, assume everything you say is “on the record.”
- If the reporter repeats a question, welcome the opportunity to state your message more clearly.
- The reporter is a conduit; speak to the public, not the reporter.
- If you are a spokesperson for the University — or for a committee or other organization of Florida State — and you don’t know the University’s position on a particular issue, find out; don’t speculate.
- **If you can’t discuss something, explain as much as you can. “No comment” sounds as though you’re hiding something.**
- If you know the answer to a question, but can’t say because you are not the appropriate spokesperson, refer the reporter elsewhere.
- Be informative, not conversational. Beware of the reporter who remains silent, encouraging you to ramble or dilute your message. Don’t fill those lulls with conversation.
- Be mindful of a reporter’s probing questions — the reporter may be coaxing you to say more than you want to say.
- Don’t assume that if a reporter says to you, “so-and-so said such-and-such is true,” that so-and-so actually did say such-and-such. The reporter may just want confirmation from you of what he/she has heard about such-and-such.
- **Keep your cool; don’t argue with the reporter.**
- It’s the reporter’s job to gather facts and tell the story accurately. Never ask to preview the story. Instead, listen carefully during the interview to be aware of when the reporter may not understand something.
- Correct the record if the reporter makes an error or had wrong information.
- **Maintain a positive attitude.** You’re the expert with a message to deliver. Encourage the reporter to call back if clarification is needed.

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