

Crafting the Media Release

What is a media release?

Media releases provide media with your messaging about an issue or event. Reporters and editors use them as sources of specific information and starting points for stories. A good release will alert media to the story and encourage them to investigate and follow up with you directly.

There are two types of media releases:

- The Media Advisory – intended to notify reporters and editors about a specific event. They can also be used to indicate that your faculty association is available to comment on an issue or event (such as the release of a new report or the provincial budget). Media advisories are usually released one to two days before the highlighted event.
- The General Release – intended to deliver your message on a given issue or event directly to reporters and editors. They contain your key messages, specific information on the story, several quotes from your representatives, and contact information. An effective general release both *informs* and *engages* media. It is a starting point for a conversation that hopefully results in positive coverage.

Distribution

Most media releases are distributed electronically. This can take several forms:

- E-mail – you can send the release directly to reporters in your community who are potentially interested in the story. It is useful to maintain a list of media contacts for this kind of distribution. If you have a relationship with a particular reporter or news outlet, they will be more likely to cover your story.
- Wire services – these organizations – such as Canada Newswire (<http://www.newswire.ca>) distribute news releases widely, to local, regional and national print and electronic media. While efficient, they can also be expensive. OCUFA maintains an account with Canada Newswire, and can assist you to distribute your release through their network.

If your release concerns a specific event – such as a budget announcement or press conference – it is a good idea to bring printed copies of your release for direct distribution to reporters.

Tips for a good release

- A good, punchy headline will capture interest and encourage journalists to read your release.
- Use the “inverted pyramid” – the most important information comes first, followed by supporting information. The who, what, where, when and why of the story should be in the first paragraph. Reporters are taught to write in this style, and using it allows you to ‘speak their language’.
- Avoid jargon or technical language – your release should be written in a focused, conversational style that can be widely understood by a general audience.

- Keep it short and simple – the release should be focused on your key messages and be around 250-400 words. There should be around 5-7 short paragraphs of around 3-4 sentences. Reporters won't read dense or over-long releases.
- Don't repeat yourself – this is especially important with quotes. You don't want your spokesperson to restate the lead over and over again.
- Follow-up – phone local reporters to make sure they received the release. This can help focus them on the story.
- Be persistent – your release may not generate media coverage. But the next time you put a release out, reporters will be more familiar with your organizations and your message.

Sample Release

New report finds today's students are paying more for less

The title should, in as few words as possible, explain what the story is all about. If possible, the headline should contain an 'action', or verb ('finds'). It should also contain a hook, or something that intrigues the reader ('paying more for less'). Remember to keep it short—eight-to-ten words is a good target.

TORONTO – A new report released today by the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) finds that declining quality and rising tuition fees means that university students are paying more money for less education. When measured against several key indicators of learning quality, students in the 1960s received a better education than students today – for a bargain price.

This is the 'lead', or the most important part of the release. The first sentence restates the headline, but with more information. All of the most important information – the who, what, where & when – are expressed in these two sentences.

"Engagement with full-time faculty and high-quality labs and classrooms are cornerstones of a meaningful university experience," said Prof. Mark Langer, President of OCUFA. "This new research shows that students are learning in ever-larger classes and aging infrastructure. When you consider the tuition fees these students must pay, it's clear they are not getting the same value their parents did."

Quotes can play a variety of roles in a press release. Here, it is used to state the 'why' of the story, or the reason it is important. It also contains several key messages.

The study, *The Decline of Quality at Ontario Universities: Shortchanging a Generation*, contrasts the student experience in the 1960s, 1990s, and the present day. Students in the 1960s learned in small classes and benefitted from brand-new facilities. Now, Ontario has the highest student-to-faculty ratio in Canada, and much of the province's campus infrastructure is now decades old. Without the ability to engage with their professors and access state-of-the-art labs, libraries and classrooms, students are just not getting the same educational depth as their counterparts in the 1960s. Ontario also has tuition fees higher than anywhere else in the country, both in terms of absolute dollars and as a proportion of university operating revenue.

This paragraph contains data and key statistics that expand upon the information provided in the lead. It serves to provide deeper context for individuals interested in the story.

“The decline in quality at Ontario universities is a problem forty years in the making. It is not the fault of any one government, but the result of years of under-funding and misguided policies,” said Langer. “Our university system is now at a crossroads. Down one path is further decline. Down the other is well-funded, high-quality higher education that meets the needs of our province. OCUFA believes that renewed government investment in higher education is the only way to ensure the value of an Ontario university degree for today’s students and generations of students to come.”

This quote provides additional context and concludes with an essential part of the messaging around this story – namely, how do solve the problem outlined in the release?

Founded in 1964, OCUFA represents over 15,000 faculty and academic librarians in 26 faculty associations across Ontario. For more information, please visit the OCUFA website at <http://www.ocufa.on.ca>.

The last paragraph should provide more information on your organization. We’ve also provided a website link should the reader want more information.

-30-

Press releases always end with “-30-“

Contact: Graeme Stewart – 416 979 2117 x232 (office) or 647 280 3175 gstewart@ocufa.on.ca

Be sure to include contact information of your spokesperson or media manager. And, make sure that person is available to take calls after the release is distributed.