Publicizing research findings
(Updated 3/25/13)

Why should faculty members consider publicizing their research?
News stories on University of Utah research are read by state legislators, citizens, donors and, when there is national publicity, people at federal funding agencies. Research results can help inform decisions on important public issues. Many grant applications require public outreach and education, and there certainly is a need to improve public appreciation of science and how research benefits society. Popular press coverage makes it more likely research will be seen and cited by other scientists. Finally, popular press coverage of research often results in valuable contacts with potential collaborators.

Most national and international publicity about the university comes from coverage of peer-reviewed research findings. Announcements about grants, appointments and awards rarely get more coverage than brief mentions in local newspapers. This is why the communications office focuses on research findings.

Which studies should I submit for consideration to become a news release?
In general, studies that are newsworthy tend to have some relevance to readers, their health and their lives; to society and modern problems; or simply are findings that inspire laypeople to think “gee whiz!”

However, even some relatively esoteric research has successfully received coverage in trade publications. And some esoteric research simply may be interesting and thus newsworthy. For example, The New York Times has done stories on University of Utah research involving how plants named cycads are pollinated and why some frog tadpoles eat like fish.

If you have a study and are unsure if it could be a news release, feel free to send it to the appropriate public relations person below and discuss it with them. Send your manuscripts as an attachment, and in your email, include a few sentences in layperson-friendly English explaining what you did, what you found and why it is significant.

When should I submit a study to University of Utah Communications?
Send your study to the appropriate public relations person (see below) soon after you submit it – and absolutely no later than acceptance, although in some cases that may be too late.

The public relations representative needs time to read your study, interview you about it, draft a news release, have you review it for accuracy, and then issue it to the media to coincide with publication or with an “embargo,” if there is one. Expect to spend one to two hours for the interview, possibly more for very complex or technical papers.

Keep in mind: the university’s public relations staff is too small to do news releases on more than a fraction of the research conducted by thousands of faculty members. So some requests for news releases must be declined. That’s why, to maximize your chances of having a news release written, you must be able to explain it in terms understandable and interesting to the news media and the general public.
What is an embargo and why are they important?

Major journals like *Science, Nature* and the *Journal of the AMA* impose embargoes on papers they are about to publish. An embargo is a specific time and date before which a study may not be publicized. But journals with embargoes allow research institutions to send embargoed news releases to trusted reporters a few days to a week or more before the embargo expires so the reporters have time to prepare stories.

For example, *Science* is published on Fridays. The journal’s embargo is noon MT Thursday, the day before publication. *Science* allows universities to issue news releases on studies under embargo as early as 6 p.m. MT Sunday prior to publication. To do that, a news release must be ready to go by Friday morning a full week before the study is published. That means the public relations office must hear about a study at least two weeks prior to publication in order to have a news release ready on time.

Embargoes also are important because they provide a timely news “peg” to news stories on studies so the stories can say the study “was published today in the journal X.”

Most major media will not publish stories on studies after the online publication dates of those studies, which is why it is crucial to have news releases ready to issue at the time specified by the journal in question.

Many journals do not have formal embargoes. In those cases, it is best to issue news releases a week to a few days prior to a study’s journal online publication date so it is seen as new and timely by the media.

What happens after the news release is issued?

On the day your news release is issued, and perhaps for a few days afterward – depending on the level of media interest – you must be available to answer media phone calls and e-mails as quickly as possible. That means in minutes to tens of minutes. The media work in a very rapid time frame, so a reporter may drop your story and move to something else if they cannot reach you immediately or hear back from you within minutes to an hour at most.

How much time you will need to spend on media interviews depends on how popular a story your study becomes. Most researchers field no more than a half dozen to a dozen media calls, interviews and emails over a few days. But if your research proves to be big news, your “15 minutes of fame” may last days to – in rare cases – weeks.

What about photographs?

Photos and other illustrations must have resolution adequate for newspaper and magazine publication: at least 300 dpi at a size that might be used in print, say 4 inches by 6 inches or larger. Photos in jpg format are preferred. Media generally will not use technical photos with graphs, symbols or legends; unadorned photos are preferred. Photos of researchers should be tightly framed on at one or at most two researchers doing something in the lab or field. Most media will not use group photos, so do not submit them.

Who do I contact if I would like to publicize an upcoming study?

-- Lee Siegel, science news specialist, University of Utah Communications, 801-581-8993, lee.siegel@utah.edu covers the colleges of science, engineering (with Aditi
Aditi Risbud, senior communications and marketing officer, College of Engineering, 801-587-9038, aditi.risbud@coe.utah.edu covers research in all departments in College of Engineering. Also does news releases on college events.

-- Phil Sahm, public relations specialist, Health Sciences Center Public Affairs, 801-581-2517, phil.sahm@hsc.utah.edu generally is responsible for covering science stories in the School of Medicine and colleges of pharmacy, nursing and health.

-- Kathy Wilets, associate director, Health Sciences Center Public Affairs, 801-581-5717, Kathy.Wilets@hsc.utah.edu also covers some research.

-- Valoree Dowell, national news specialist, University of Utah Public Relations, 801-585-6861, v.dowell@utah.edu responsible for covering colleges of social and behavioral sciences (with Lee Siegel), fine arts, architecture and planning, education and social work,

-- Remi Barron, public relations specialist, University of Utah Public Relations, (801) 581-7295, r.barron@utah.edu covers the College of Law, Tech Ventures Development, sustainability and facilities.

-- Jana Cunningham, public relations specialist, 801-581-3862, jana.cunningham@utah.edu, responsible for covering research in colleges of business and humanities.

-- Collin Barrett, public relations specialist, College of Science – office 801-587-8527, barrett@science.utah.edu. News releases on college events, honors.