

Tips for Training Small College Media "Stars"

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Every college and university, no matter what the size, has four or five faculty members with a particular area of expertise that is sought after by the media. Faculty expertise can be long-lasting, as might be the case for a World War II historian, or short term, as would be the case for your experts on Portuguese Water Dogs and late-night variety show successions.

Here are a few tips on how to find, cultivate, and harvest a few media stars on your campus.

- Most, if not all small college faculty members are at small colleges because they love to teach. Imprint on every professor that any media request is an opportunity to teach to a larger audience. Journalists are usually interviewing college professors because they need a person to explain a difficult concept coherently and succinctly—who better to do that than a great teacher?
- Once you've found your four or five "stars," get their permission to respond to media queries immediately without making a phone call to see if they're free. Speed is of the essence for small colleges. A simple cc on your e-mail to a reporter should be enough to notify the professor. Make sure they are comfortable doing e-mail interviews as well. More print and Web reporters rely on this interview option.
- Let your roots show. Play up the small college-angle. National media usually like at least three sources: an Ivy, a large state university and a third option. Be that third option by being fast, being quotable and preferably being a professor with a reliably interesting take on events.
- DO NOT pass the buck. A small college professor's first reaction to a media request is "You really need to talk with Joe Smith at Harvard, he's the authority on this." Uh, no, they really don't need to talk to Joe Smith. He's quoted everywhere. Reporters really don't like talking to the same sources (called the Bob Thompson-Norman Ornstein-Terry Madonna Syndrome), they need to talk to new people. Ask the professor to recommend other sources only if asked and then do it after the interview's over.
- Recommend your stars for every media request within their expertise, no matter how big or small the outlet. Faculty sources get famous by delivering reliable quotes and the more reporters that know them, the more they will be quoted. Reporters also tend to take their favorite sources along as they move up the career ladder. The more they are interviewed the better they'll be as sources.

- If there is a true star on the faculty who treats you arrogantly or is uncooperative, it's best to leave that person alone. In general, no amount of training is going to make them less condescending or more friendly.
- Look for op-ed opportunities LOCALLY and nationally for your star expert faculty. Media people still read opinion columns and this is a nice way to establish your faculty stars in their field.