Getting Out the News About Your Faculty

_A Guide for U. of I. Unit Heads and Communicators_

You’re already aware of the U. of I. News Bureau and what we produce: There’s Inside Illinois in your mailbox. There are “A Minute With™” faculty interviews on the campus home page. And you may be seeing the news releases we send and post daily.

We’re here to get the word out about your faculty’s newsworthy research and expertise.

To do that effectively, however, it helps if you know what we do and don’t do, and why – and how you can help the writer covering your unit.

Without further ado, a three-page primer, along with a one-page cheat sheet at the end (“News and the U. of I. News Bureau”).

The Basics

The News Bureau is part of Public Affairs on the Urbana-Champaign campus. Our primary job is to promote news coverage of the campus.

Our _prime focus_, however, is to seek out faculty research or expertise we judge to have news potential _beyond the discipline, the campus and the local community_. Most often, that means research with its own intrinsic news value, or expertise strongly related to events or issues in the news.

We spread the word through two principal means: news releases and “A Minute With™” interviews.

**News releases** are emailed to select media and posted on our News Bureau website, where they also can be found later by reporters searching for experts.

“A Minute With™” interviews are tied to events or issues in the news. A quick turnaround by the professor is often key. It’s posted for several days to a week on the campus home page, usually emailed to news media, and saved in “A Minute With™” archive, also accessible on the campus home page.

In some cases, we might produce a short **video** to accompany the piece, whether it’s a release or “A Minute With™”.

We also promote everything on **Twitter** and **Facebook**:
[https://twitter.com/NewsAtIllinois](https://twitter.com/NewsAtIllinois) / [https://www.facebook.com/NewsAtIllinois](https://www.facebook.com/NewsAtIllinois)
Much of what we produce also appears in **Inside Illinois**, the campus faculty/staff newspaper, and is picked up by other campus, unit and alumni publications and e-newsletters. So even though it’s written first for audiences **beyond the campus**, departments and faculty often see benefits from the added visibility **on campus**.

You also should know about **Postmarks**, a publication we send each fall and spring to the parents of all undergraduates — something to keep in mind should you have a unique course or program focused on those students.

Links to the above can be found near the top of our **home page**: [http://news.illinois.edu](http://news.illinois.edu)

If promoting a department or unit event is your main concern, you can find resources through an **Event Planning Guide** on the Public Affairs site: [http://publicaffairs.illinois.edu/eventplanning/gettingstarted.html](http://publicaffairs.illinois.edu/eventplanning/gettingstarted.html)

You can also send items about either events or faculty honors to Inside Illinois. They will appear in the **Briefs** and **Achievements** sections, respectively. For the publication schedule, deadlines and contact info: [http://news.illinois.edu/about_inside_illinois.html](http://news.illinois.edu/about_inside_illinois.html)

Finally, you should know about “**Illinois in the News,**” our daily email of U. of I. and higher education news clips. Subscribe at [https://illinois.edu/gm/subscribe?groupId=1644](https://illinois.edu/gm/subscribe?groupId=1644)

**The Beat Writer**

Just like reporters at a newspaper, the writers at the News Bureau have beats, or collections of units we cover. There are just six of us on a large campus, so **each writer covers potentially dozens of units and several hundred faculty members**. Writers are charged with keeping up with the news in areas related to their beats.

Writers have limited time to truly explore a department and soak up the range or significance of the faculty’s expertise and research. Other challenges come in deciphering academic language in a variety of disciplines, and in papers, books and faculty Web pages.

As a result, newsworthy research can often be like the big fish never caught because it hides at the bottom of a large or murky pond. Expertise relevant to breaking news may not be found without much digging and sorting, and maybe too late.

Even when writers are aware of that research or expertise, there’s the challenge of keeping track of it, contacting faculty for updates, and determining when or how it may connect with the news. (Major findings, of course, may be their own news.)

**Our greatest opportunities come when we have the right person, at the right time, with directly relevant information or insight framed in everyday terms.**
How You Can Help

Ideally, the News Bureau writers like information through both a fire hose and a filter.

The **fire hose** is all the sources of information available about a unit and its faculty. Writers can scan these to stay aware and avoid missing things.

The **filter** is anyone who can highlight what's significant, with an eye on the news.

Some ways this translates into specifics:

**Connect your beat writer in the News Bureau with department sources of information.**

- Your email list for news and announcements, if you're comfortable with that.
- Your department and alumni newsletters – e-versions best.
- Your Facebook fan site, RSS and/or Twitter feeds.
- Faculty blogs tied to the scholars' work.
- Any faculty list you maintain that has easy-to-scan descriptions of expertise. (The lists on department websites often require a time-consuming click through each name.)

**Pass along updates on important faculty projects as you hear about them.**

Ideally, News Bureau writers like to know about papers and books *several months before* they're published, and further in advance doesn't hurt. The writer may find a news angle before publication that won't be there after. (Nothing is shared, written or sent out, by the way, without talking to the author.)

**Connect the writer with faculty or staff well-informed about colleagues' work.**

Ideally, they're also able to translate that work into everyday terms and have a sense of the news. (What is news? See the attached “News and the U. of I. News Bureau.”)

**Call your beat writer when a news story or developing trend connects with department expertise.** If you’re seeing a story and find yourself saying “Professor X would really have something to say about that,” that’s a good trigger to call.

**With all communications:** If you’re on the fence, send it rather than not. The writers would rather know than not know. And they don’t mind phone calls.

Prepared by Craig Chamberlain, U. of I. News Bureau

*See the next page for “News and the U. of I. News Bureau,” a one-page cheat sheet, which can be used as a handout.*
News and the U. of I. News Bureau (a cheat sheet)

Every faculty member’s work is important. Unfortunately, even truly significant work within a field is not always of interest to the general news media: newspapers, radio, TV, online, etc.

What is news?
Traditionally, news is fresh, relevant information about an issue or event that can be applied to daily life. It’s information that’s of interest to a wide range of people.

What are the elements of a news story?
- Impact: Does it affect people’s daily lives? Their pocketbooks?
- Prominence: Is there a big name or prominent institution involved?
- Proximity: Is it close to home? Close to my country, my state, my community?
- Conflict: Is there a conflict between people, viewpoints, ideas?
- Unusual: Is there something out of the ordinary or expected?
- Human Interest: Is it a story of triumph or tragedy? A story that touches the heart?
- Timeliness: Is it fresh? Relevant to a recent event? To a current or upcoming issue?

The more of these elements in a story, the more likely it will make news.

How does this apply to faculty and departments?
The prime focus of the six News Bureau writers is to seek out faculty research or expertise with news potential beyond the discipline, campus and local community.

Guidelines for working effectively with the News Bureau:
- Inform us about papers or books with news potential well before publication. There may be a news angle that presents itself before publication that may not be there after.
- Contact us immediately about expertise directly relevant to a developing news event or issue.
- If possible, give us a concise explanation for why something might have news value.
- Work with your unit communicator, who serves as another conduit for information and tips.

What we typically do not cover, at least through news releases:
- Edited books by multiple authors; papers on which a U. of I. faculty member is not the lead.
- Grant awards, faculty presentations, retirements, unit anniversaries, most awards and honors.
- Campus talks or conferences – except where someone of obvious public prominence is involved and the event is open to the public.

To publicize campus events and faculty honors:
Event Planning (and Publicity): [http://publicaffairs.illinois.edu/eventplanning/gettingstarted.html](http://publicaffairs.illinois.edu/eventplanning/gettingstarted.html)

Inside Illinois, which runs advance info on campus events and short items on faculty honors, in its Briefs and Achievements sections respectively. For the paper’s schedule, deadlines and contact info: [news.illinois.edu/about_inside_illinois.html](http://news.illinois.edu/about_inside_illinois.html). (Briefs should be under 350 words.)