Luncheon Handout

How researchers can promote their own work

* Reach out to your communications team. UT CNS has a form at <https://utexasscience.wufoo.com/forms/z3pnm2q1pkwmfp/>
* Write your own pitch. See additional handout for info.
* Research publications and find journalists that are writing about your field or an adjacent field. Find their email addresses and social media handles and reach out to them with your pitch.
* Use social media to help get the word out about your research.
* Create a blog to discuss research in your field, not just your own. Create written content around your science by interviewing colleagues, discussing general topics in the field, sharing news stories and more.
* Doing these things establishes you as a thought leader. When a journalist, or anyone else, Googles experts in your field, your name may come up. The more times you are mentioned and the more places you are mentioned, the more likely your name will be near the top.

Podcasts

* CNS has its own podcast, Point of Discovery. Reach out to Marc Airhart in the CNS office for more information.
* Research science-focused podcasts and contact the producers or hosts to pitch an idea for an episode or an interview. Listen to a few episodes to make sure your research or expertise is a good fit for their format.
* Develop your own podcast. It’s easier than ever to start your own podcast. A quality microphone and some audio editing software and you’re on your way. It doesn’t have to be long running podcast either. There are limited series that discuss a single topic.
* Podcast appearances and your own series are great ways to get your name and research out to the public. This helps establish you as a thought leader.

Video

* If your research lends itself to video presentation, take as many videos as you can. Using these with press releases increases the chance a media outlet will pick it up. It also grabs attention on social media.
* Reach out to science-focused YouTube channels or start your own. You don’t need much more than a newer smartphone and video editing software. While higher production value looks nice, it’s not necessary. There are plenty of successful YouTubers that shoot on iPhones.

Ways to establish relationships with journalists

* Email them. Read their stories and drop them a note letting them know you liked the story. Journalists catch a lot of flack from the public, and the rare encouraging or complimentary note really stands out.
* Follow them on social media and comment on their posts, share their stories. They will probably follow you back.
* Connect with them in real life or virtually. High-profile journalists often host panels at conferences or events. If one is happening nearby, like SXSW, or virtually, drop in and say hi. Introduce yourself. If you’ve already had contact via email or social media, ask them if they’d like get lunch or a coffee after the event.
* Once you have reached out a few times, then pitch your stories. High-profile journalists can be hard to reach and they are very busy, but they will make time for sources they know and trust.

Attractive research topics for journalists

* Anything that would be interesting to the lay public. Topics such as wildlife, animals, human behavior, human health, nature, nutrition and relationships are all topics that are an easy sell to journalists. People want to know more about the world around them and things that affect their everyday lives.
* Firsts. If your research is the first to do something, mention that in the first sentence.

How to make a story interesting

* If the topic is complicated, try to come up with a good analogy. I worked with Dr. Rasika Harshey in MBS a while back. She found that bacteria on the edges of swarms send up these chemical signals when they are destroyed by antibiotics. These signals allow other bacteria in the swarm to change their cellular process to protect them, somewhat, from the antibiotics. “So, the bacteria let out little chemical ‘death screams’ to warn others?” I asked. This concept ended up in the pitch and led to some big media coverage for research that was quite niche and dense.
* Find something unusual about your research that grabs attention and is familiar. For example, the chemistry department had a paper about reagents they developed that glowed when they came into contact with nerve gas. Pretty cool. But then they came up with a box made out of Legos that worked with a smartphone and an app to analyze the reagents to determine which nerve gas agent was in play. UT Develops Lego Nerve Gas Detector. The headline writes itself and it was a huge hit.
* Another example was a team in MBS that used DNA to store data. This was interesting to a niche audience that’s interested in long-term, energy efficient data storage. But they chose to store a copy of the Wizard of Oz in Esperanto in the DNA. This small detail launched this story into the mainstream.

How to decide who does the work

* The principal investigator should always be mentioned in a press release. But graduate and undergraduate students, postdocs, research scientists and others in the lab can also be quoted, particularly if they did the bulk of the work.
* I always mention every author and their affiliate institution in a paragraph at the bottom of every release, so no one feels left out. I also mention all of the funders.

Considerations for giving interviews

* See additional handout on Esther’s interview tips.
* If a journalist reaches out to you, do your research. See what they’ve written and how balanced it seems. Watch videos of their other interviews. You can even reach out to other scientists quoted in their previous stories and ask if the interview experience was a good one and if the coverage was satisfactory.
* Make sure the outlet has a good reputation. Do some internet research to see if the outlet has a reputation for fair coverage or if they are plagued by misinformation.