

Managing Controversy

Preparations & Responses: A Handbook for Survival

I. The Three Audiences

- Executive Administration
- Student Media Staff (internal)
- Campus & Local Community

II. Mindsets

Executive Administration

- Directive as opposed to advisory
- PR/Recruiting tool
- Laboratory productions
- Career/resume builder
- Don't mess with contributions
- None, just don't give me a headache

Student Staff

- Relatively young, unskilled, but experimenting
- Try to be taken seriously
- Sometimes dualistic
- Sometimes defensive/closed
- Fight city hall/David & Goliath
- Mr. Short Term Memory (as a group, by the very nature of colleges)
- Shock value: Light the fuse, take cover and watch

Campus & Local Community

- PR for pet programs: I don't see my release
- Activity fee drain
- Child's toy/"Those darn kids"
- That stuff around my ad
- General loss of faith in the media

III. What to Do:

- Include CMA Code of Ethics/responsibilities in your position description
- Create policy statements and include in handbooks, etc.,
- Recruit a high level administrative friend
- Get together with your media relations office and offer a workshop for faculty & staff on how to work with the press (and student press)
- Be clear, consistent
- Inform up the ladder; copy others, keep notes & emails
- Problem solve as opposed to excuse. Remember their agenda, mindset. We were hired because we solve problems

- Define purposes
- Ongoing training, conferences
- Recruit faculty advisers
- Remember strength is in relationships
- Avoid the us-against-them trust gaining techniques
- Policy & procedure manuals
- Stress team rather than individual direction
- Encourage other activities than the medium itself. Stay in touch with audiences. Watch out for cliquishness
- Expect a lot from your students. And then trust them

- Offer discounts for student group, college affiliated advertising. We want potential critics to be like Blanche in Streetcar - depending on the kindness of strangers
- Encourage student, faculty, staff profiles
Be wary of too much non-campus related reviews, commentary. Put the campus first
- Have fun, play hard, and take roles seriously. Discourage April Fools' Day issues, inside jokes, etc.,
- Be a paid scapegoat. Listen to complaints
- Build advertising and other sources of income to reduce reliance on activity dollars

General:

- Build a strong but non-obtrusive governing board. Better yet, include a member of the executive administration. Is your administration worried about losing contributions? Include a member of your foundation - make your enemies your friends (my, but we're sly dogs, aren't we?)
- Avoid legal or even win/lose situations, if possible. Work towards dialogue, win/win
- Be fair, don't sell out

- Build relationships with all groups, be aware of their perspectives, agendas, needs. Remember, as professionals, we have an obligation to be aware of all agendas, not just our own or our students
- Join local press groups
- Stay in touch with the SPLC
- Thank Eddie Blick for the CMA-L
- Read other publications
- Hold public forums, sponsor or cosponsor lectures and panel discussions.

