

**Policy 1508**  
**Media Relations and Social Media Publishing**

**Date of Current Revision: May 2017**

**Primary Responsible Officer: Director, Office of Communications**

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## **1. PURPOSE**

The university's employees may be called upon to interact with members of the traditional news media in conducting the business of the university. In addition, the university, its departments, employees and students may use social media websites to conduct the business of the university. This policy is designed to provide guidance for employees and students when called upon to conduct university business using traditional news media or social media in the following ways:

1. To establish, sustain and manage a positive relationship between the university and traditional news media outlets.
2. To establish, clarify and coordinate the university's role in the use of social media.
3. To ensure the university's strategic priorities and messages are advanced in a consistent and effective manner through traditional and social media.

## **2. AUTHORITY**

The Board of Visitors has been authorized by the Commonwealth of Virginia to govern James Madison University. See Code of Virginia § 23.1-1600. The Board has delegated the authority to manage the university to the president.

This policy adheres to the Virginia Department of Human Resource Management Policy 1.75, [Use of Electronic Communications and Social Media](#).

## **3. DEFINITIONS**

### **Media outreach:**

Any correspondence or activity that utilizes news or social media to raise awareness of the university or its departments and/or its operating units. Examples of media outreach efforts include, but are not limited to, press releases, media advisories, press conferences, calendar items, social networking, blogging, podcasting, micro-blogging and social bookmarking.

### **Social media:**

Online and mobile-based technologies used to share information, opinions, experiences and perspectives. Social media includes platforms designed to facilitate conversations and build relationships among targeted audiences. These tools include, but are not limited to, social networks, blogs, podcasts, micro blogs, bookmarks, online communities, wikis and sites that allow user-generated content.

### **Traditional news media:**

Organizations that report on current events via newspapers, magazines, journals, television, radio or the Internet.

## 4. APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all James Madison University employees and other non-university personnel, vendors and/or contractors who may, during the course of their assigned JMU responsibilities, have responsibility to communicate on behalf of the university with members of the traditional news media or social media.

## 5. POLICY

5.1 All traditional news media outreach on behalf of the university or its departments or operating units must be initiated by or coordinated through the Office of Communications. All news media outreach shall be consistent with the university's strategic priorities and messages.

5.2 Any university employee who has a responsibility to communicate in their official university capacity with the university's targeted audiences through traditional news media or social media must complete training conducted or approved by the Office of Communications.

5.3 Any university employee who represents him or herself as communicating on behalf of James Madison University while engaged in social media activity shall be subject to all university policies and procedures.

5.4 During a declared university emergency, only the university president, university spokesperson and/or an individual designated by the university president or university spokesperson may publicly speak on behalf of the university.

5.5 Any news and social media outreach efforts on behalf of the institution must comply with all James Madison University Identity System standards as outlined in [Policy 1502](#).

## 6. PROCEDURES

6.1 Any university employee initiating contact with members of the traditional news media or social media is encouraged to consult with the Office of Communications in advance, in accordance with section 5.1 of this policy.

6.2 In the event that a university employee is contacted by a member of the traditional news media or through social media, the employee:

- should ask the journalist about the subject and "angle" of the news or social media story.
- should ask the journalist what the deadline is.
- may respond to the journalist's questions if the employee has the requested information and, in the employee's supervisor's opinion, it is appropriate for the employee to do so.
- may refer the call to the Office of Communications or consult with the Office of Communications for advice.

A journalist's request for information should receive a response from the appropriate university official.

6.3 University employees who are required to interact with the news media in their official university capacity are encouraged to contact the Office of Communications for training.

6.4 Employees who use social media in their job duties are encouraged to coordinate with the Office of Communications to get social media training as noted in section 5.1, including strategies and methods for attracting the widest possible audience in their social media communications.

6.5 Information that is officially sanctioned and/or produced by the university and is intended for use in a social media outreach effort shall be disseminated through the university's official avenues of social media communication. Other information that is not sanctioned and/or produced by the university may be disseminated through the university's official avenues of social media communication at the discretion of the director of the Office of Communications.

## **7. RESPONSIBILITIES**

Employees who communicate on behalf of the university with members of the traditional news media or through social media are responsible for creating a positive image and identity for the institution and, in carrying out this responsibility, shall do so in accordance with applicable laws and regulations (including, but not limited to, the [DHRM policy 1.75, Family Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#), copyright laws, etc.) as well as other applicable university policies and standards of employee conduct.

Employees are responsible for clearly indicating when they are speaking or writing as a private citizen or expert in an area of expertise, and when they are speaking or writing as an official representative of the university.

Heads of departments and operating units are responsible for ensuring that any news media or social media outreach efforts originating in their respective departments or units comply with this policy.

The director of communications, in consultation with the associate vice president of communications and marketing, is responsible for determining whether a traditional news or social media outreach effort is consistent with the university's strategic priorities and messages, for coordinating training for employees under this policy and for advising employees who are contacted by members of the traditional news media or social media.

## **8. SANCTIONS**

Traditional news or social media outreach efforts that do not conform to this policy will be restricted or terminated.

Sanctions will be commensurate with the severity and/or frequency of the offense and may include termination of employment.

## **9. EXCLUSIONS**

- This policy does not apply to Intercollegiate Athletics in their regular, day-to-day efforts to promote the university's intercollegiate-athletic programs.
- This policy does not apply to social media efforts that are considered part of the academic or scholarly mission of the university, such as classroom assignments, faculty portfolios or scholarly research.

## **10. INTERPRETATION**

The authority to interpret this policy rests with the president and is generally delegated to the vice president for university advancement.

Previous Version: December 2013  
Approved by the President: December 2013