

Guidelines for News Outreach: Online and Print

Many Weinberg departments and programs publish newsletters in print and online one or more times each year in order to inform alumni, students or other audiences about key news and events. Other departments and programs post occasional news items online and do not have a formal print or online newsletter currently but would like to start one. Still others may not yet have developed a news outreach plan of any type. Regardless of which of these three categories your department or program falls into, you should find useful information below for starting or improving your news outreach, whether solely through online or through a combination of print and online.

Getting Started

To give a general direction to your news outreach, help you decide what to emphasize, and clear up key editorial issues upfront, it is essential that the department/program's decision-makers discuss and come to an agreement on these basic points:

- Who is your target audience? Alumni and friends of the department, faculty and staff, or current or prospective students? A combination? The approach to these audiences will differ, as we will discuss below.
- What is the purpose of the news outreach? To strengthen the alumni connection with the department? To assist in fund-raising? To draw attention to the accomplishments of the faculty? To encourage and guide students in their major? Or is it a combination of these objectives?
- Will the news outreach be mailed in a printed newsletter, or is it meant to be read online? Or is it a combination of the two?
- **Key considerations for online news outreach:**
 - Where will you feature the news items on your site?
 - Will news predominantly be drawn from a printed newsletter? If not, who within the program or department can be tapped to help create occasional news items?
- **Key considerations for printed newsletters:**
 - What is the budget to produce, print, and mail the newsletter? Knowing this will help determine the format, the length, the use of photos and illustrations, etc.

- Do you have funding in your newsletter budget to hire design and writing help? Just a first time, to produce a template, or each time?
- Is your newsletter meant to be published biannually, once a quarter, or on some other schedule? (Please note that any mailing to alumni and friends that solicits donations should adhere to the Development Office's annual schedule for such mailings.)

Content That Intrigues, Enriches

Remember that whoever your readers are, they are busy people. Content should intrigue them, keep them informed, open up their world through lectures and events, instill feelings of pride in the department/program and the University, and, in general, add value to their lives.

- Less is more. Your content will stand out if it is brief and tells them right up front why they should be interested in a piece.
- Redundancy can be a problem when multiple authors are writing about the same events or awards. Tightly edit your publication to reduce the extraneous.
- Take an informal survey of your target audiences to determine what they want to know from you and then select a few of the most important items.

For Alumni and Friends of the Department

Possible news stories or departments to appear in each issue:

- Awards won by graduates, students, faculty. Choose only a few of the most important awards and write about them in story form. (People prefer stories to lists.) Perhaps a few paragraphs from the professor who won a PECASE award, for example, and what it will mean to his or her research.
- Class notes (perhaps a short profile of an interesting graduate each time?)
- Books written by faculty that might interest a general audience
- Books recommended by the faculty (what they themselves are reading and why)
- Calendar of upcoming lectures and events to which readers are invited (possibly evening events featuring guest speakers and topics of reasonably broad appeal)
- Gifts to the department and how they are being used

Possible feature items:

- Story about a new course which represents a change in direction or incorporates an innovative teaching method
- A few profiles of exciting new hires and what they might mean to the department
- Thumbnail sketches of current students doing interesting things
- Profiles of favorite professors, past and present
- The hotly-debated issues in the field
- Changes in the study of the field over the last few decades
- The kind of jobs recent graduates are pursuing
- Stories from grads about how their major has enriched their lives, impacted their careers, etc.

For the Student Audience

The newsletter geared to a student readership will differ in both tone and content from a publication directed toward alumni. The tone will be more informal and conversational. Content might include:

- Detailed information about new courses
- Reminders of sign-up deadlines
- Introductions to new professors
- Any changes in department or program requirements
- Invitations to upcoming lectures and events
- Brief ‘bullets’ about the history of the department/program
- Careers of alumni in the field
- Information about fellowships and graduate programs

Style Matters

Your news items will look more professional if you are consistent in matters of style, even very small ones. Please refer to the University Relations’ website on style: <http://bit.ly/nu-style-guide> You may find this invaluable on matters of capitalization, punctuation, use of titles, etc., because the same questions tend to arise again and again.

Online Production Tips

As a standard practice, if your department and program produces a newsletter, your website should contain the content of the newsletter, both for the benefit of

those who are not on your print subscriber list and that of the larger web audience in general, including prospective students/parents, friends of the university community, faculty at peer institutions, etc. If your department or program is *not* publishing a newsletter at this time, key news and event bulletins can be published directly to the site as frequently as time and availability of content allow.

Recommendations for Departments/Programs NOT Producing a Newsletter

- **Baseline:** Whenever a news item becomes available, highlight it prominently on the department/program site. (Feel free to contact web@wcas.northwestern.edu for assistance in deciding optimal placement of news content on your site and/or a refresher tutorial on using Adobe Contribute to update it.)
- **Better:** Highlight news items as indicated in the ‘baseline’ step above, and also start populating a separate news page with news items as they are added to the home page. Most items of this sort have a considerable shelf life and may be of interest to infrequent site visitors as a record of past department/program activities.

Recommendations for Departments/Programs Producing a Newsletter

- **Baseline:** Upload a PDF version of the newsletter to your site and link it from the site’s news page (if available) or home page.
- **Better:** Upload a PDF version of the newsletter to your site and feature a few items from it (in HTML format) on the site’s news page (if available) and home page; refresh the items every few weeks.
- **Best:** Create a multi-page, HTML version of the newsletter content in your site’s news area and feature items from it on your home page; refresh the featured items on the home page every few weeks.

E-mail Newsletters

Some departments/programs may wish to send an occasional e-mail newsletter to alumni to supplement their print/online newsletter. NUIT is in the final stages of launching a tool that will make HTML e-mail newsletters easier to create and send. This new tool will be template-based, similar to the way Adobe Contribute creates new web site pages based on a template that already contains the basic structure and graphical and text elements (e.g., logo, contact info,

etc.). Weinberg web communications staff will communicate more details as they become available.

Print Production Tips

Basic Design and Placement Issues

- Consider putting your most interesting story on the first page to draw readers in, especially if your target audience is alumni. Stories might be: “Department Produces Largest Number of Fulbrights Ever” or “Department Graduate Wins MacArthur ‘Genius Grant’” or “Department Hires Leading Professor in the Field.” For a newsletter geared to students and filled with helpful information they need, the first page should emphasize that key content, maybe with a headline like “New Requirements Announced for the Department’s Honors Program” or “How to Pursue Summer Research Opportunities.”
- First page should include a table of contents so readers can decide at a glance what they wish to pursue.
- Photos featured on the first page and throughout the newsletter can help draw the reader into the content and add dimension to an accompanying story. Photos should be meaningful (e.g., event photos vs. a generic campus shot), in sharp focus, cropped to frame the key subject(s), and sized so that the subjects are discernible while not allowing the image to overwhelm the rest of the content on the page. A succinct caption should identify key information about the photo (i.e., who, what, when and where).
- Develop consistency in what content goes where so that it is easy for readers to find certain content, time after time. You could place the Letter from the Department Chair on the second or third page in each issue, for example, and you could put class notes or job acceptances of recent grads on the last page.
- Readability is a top concern. Regardless of the average age of your intended audience, it is important to use a type size (and type face) that is easy to read. Eight-point type is too small. Be careful of reversed-out type (light or white type on a darker background); it is more challenging to read and should be reserved for uses like headings or subheadings where the font size can be increased to offset the reduced readability.
- Be sure to include sufficient white space around your stories to avoid visually exhausting your readers. Rather than squeezing too much content

into too little space, edit longer stories to a size that acknowledges the reality that any target audience has limited time to dedicate to any piece of print or online communication. If there is no space in the newsletter to accommodate essential text (e.g., details about a major research study or new program), consider directing readers to your department's website for more in-depth coverage.

- Use bullet points for items in a long list.

Print Production Software

Adobe InDesign and Microsoft Publisher are two examples of popular desktop publishing software. InDesign is available on computers in Weinberg's Multimedia Learning Center (MMLC) in Kresge Hall and can also be purchased through Northwestern's preferred software vendor.

Mailing Lists

The Office of Alumni Relations and Development can obtain a list of alumni mailing addresses from the alumni association database, which contains the most up-to-date alumni contact information. Alumni records can be filtered by major or minor (e.g., those who minored in BIP). Requests for alumni mailing lists should be sent to devar-is-request@northwestern.edu. For guidance in filling out the request form, contact Marie Martinek, mv-martinek@northwestern.edu.