

Job Description



Job Title:	Director, Media Relations and Issues Management
Department:	University Communications
Reports To:	Associate Vice-President, Communications
Jobs Reporting:	Manager, Media Relations
Salary Grade:	USG 14
Effective Date:	March 2023

Primary Purpose

The Director, Media Relations and Issues Management is responsible for developing breakthrough strategic communications to strategically position the institution as a leader in academic and research excellence through proactive news and media strategies. They also play a key leadership role in managing Waterloo's reputation and reputational risk in times of issues, crisis and emergency using communication strategies and tactics that encompass all of Waterloo's primary channels and audiences, and by leading the development of University policies and procedures for managing issues.

The role must build and maintain relationships with senior stakeholders across the University to help them maximize the impact and alignment of key messaging across all University of Waterloo audiences externally and internally.

The role contributes to the University of Waterloo's overall communication and marketing strategy by ideating and creating consistent, high-quality materials that reinforce University strategic plans that position the University as a global leader in research, innovation, education and entrepreneurship.

The Director provides mentorship and guidance to senior leadership, communicators, faculty members and other staff in guiding their interactions with the media and shaping institutional strategy. The Director acts as the University's spokesperson and must ensure that the University maintains strong relationships with journalists locally, nationally and internationally.

Under the direction of the Associate Vice-President, Communications, the role works closely with multiple internal and external stakeholders across and leads all engagement with external media, media coaching, communication strategy, planning and delivery, engagement and channel management.

The role covers a broad set of responsibilities requiring expertise in strategic communication and storytelling, publication management, public relations, marketing and working knowledge of website best practices, social media and digital marketing to inform communication design, development and execution.

Key Accountabilities

Strategy and implementation

- Leads the development, execution and evaluation of a strategic program of media activities targeting key global audiences.
- Leads all aspects of day-to-day media relations activities including providing excellence and responsive service to the media with a full understanding of deadline pressures.

Job Description



- Leads the planning, development and distribution of high-value institutional materials for media while investigating new and agile channels to meet University communications and media relations needs.
- Oversee the development and maintenance of an expert guide and other materials to support media and researchers.
- Act as spokesperson on behalf of the University, in consultation with the Associate Vice-President, Communications.
- Build and maintain relationships with both domestic and international media.
- Provide a program of coaching and mentoring to enhance the capacity of faculty, researchers and staff in engaging with the media.
- Provide leadership in the organization and coordination of media interviews with members of the university community, including but not limited to senior administration and faculty, and provide expert strategic advice and individual counsel on media interviews.
- Accountable, working in support of Associate Vice-President, Communications and Vice-President, University Relations, for Waterloo's emergency communications planning to minimize and manage risk to the University. This includes the assessment of risk and the astute evaluation of the expected media approach to inform the development and execution of tactics and messaging when dealing with crisis.
- Support the Emergency Communications Team in the delivery of the Emergency Response Plan acting as the Emergency Communications Team Lead when required.
- Champion University Relations' guidelines to all communicators across the campus and support their development to meet these guidelines.
- Working in close co-ordination with University Relations leadership, manage the University's editorial calendar for driving awareness and engagement to enhance the University brand. Generate new ideas around sector-related topics to showcase University brand and thought leadership.

Leading or managing people

- Supervise and lead the Media Relations team to deliver high level, impactful media relations.
- Provide leadership to all campus communicators in developing collaborative communication plans and coordinated implementation. Provide support and clarification to other communicators to ensure they are confident in delivering key messages.
- Ensure the team meets deadlines and targets for effective delivery of communication channels and media programs.
- Responsible for fostering and maintaining a work environment that encourages, recognizes and rewards creativity, innovation, excellence and personal accountability.
- Identifies needs and resources to expand skills and knowledge for communication practitioners across campus by providing ongoing professional development opportunities and recommendations regarding style, best practice, technologies, training and resources, in line with specific departmental goals and budgets.
- Manage vendor services to support program needs; identify and manage the outsourcing demands of University Communications; ensure consistent top quality of vendor deliverables for the University.
- Has a direct and positive impact on the Office of the Vice-President, University Relations department and all lines of communication activity.

Insights and understanding

- Monitor and measure the media visibility of University of Waterloo and its competitors across media channels in Canada and internationally. Interpret the news agenda and the factors that will affect the news agenda.

Job Description



- Oversee the strategic and systematic evaluation of research discoveries and outcomes, University events and new developments, to identify those with the greatest potential for media coverage, with an emphasis on institutional priorities.
- Lead University-Relations wide daily news monitoring program.
- Anticipate economic, social, political, environmental and technological developments to keep activity relevant and targeted.
- Bring together views and perspectives of stakeholders to gain a wider picture of the landscape surrounding activities and policies.
- Implements changes to messaging or communication approach based on insights gathered from a range of sources.
- Develop tools and vehicles to generate sources of data to inform future communication activities.

Influence and impact

- Develop and use a range of data sources to advise leaders on the overall communications approach.
- Establish metrics to assess the effectiveness of communication and act on feedback to ensure communication is timely, relevant and meets the needs of the University and audiences.
- Recommend and implement cross-channel approaches to communication based on institutional priorities, emerging opportunities and insights gained from data analysis.

**All employees of the University are expected to follow University and departmental health and safety policy, procedures and work practices at all times. Employees are also responsible for the completion of all health and safety training, as assigned. Employees with staff supervision and/or management responsibilities will ensure that assigned staff abide by the above, and actively identify, assess and correct health and safety hazards, as required.*

Required Qualifications

Education

University degree in public relations, marketing or a communication-related field, or comparable experience.

Experience

- At least 10 years knowledge, understanding and experience of media relations, corporate communications and issues management in a complex, fast-moving and diverse corporate environment is essential.
- Several years of progressive experience performing duties related to the Key Accountabilities listed above.
- Experienced in producing diverse publications and other communication deliverables (print, web, digital) with simultaneous or overlapping deadlines, in a fast-paced environment.
- Proven experience of working in an organization with a high-profile reputation, often in the media spotlight.
- Experience of working with senior executives and leaders and demonstrating advanced influencing and negotiation skills.
- Recent experience in a senior communications role including executive level communications. Knowledge of issues management and communication planning in a post-secondary, public sector, or broader public sector environment.
- Experience working in a highly complex organization with multi-stakeholders.
- Demonstrable track record of leading, line managing and developing teams of professional staff and of balancing conflicting and pressing demands.

Job Description



- Experience of developing organizational objectives into material for targeted communications and engagement activities across a range of different channels and media, including face-to-face engagement.
- Experience with researching target markets and related data collection and analysis, preparation and presentation of reports and recommendations for inclusion in strategic documents.
- Experience of working with people with no direct or negative experience of 'professional' communications and ensuring their expectations/input/requirements from communication are effectively aligned and managed.
- Significant experience in writing, proofing and editing material (including speeches), and of presenting proposals and plans to senior/board level executives.
- Evidence of being a persuasive and dynamic leader with highly developed communication and interpersonal skills, who is outgoing and comfortable with networking, influencing and persuading at the highest level.
- Experience leading, line managing and developing teams of professional staff and of balancing conflicting and pressing demands.
- Evidence of a highly collaborative style and an ability to react quickly to changing circumstances.

Knowledge/Skills/Abilities

- Skilled writer and editor, experienced in leading institutional or corporate communication.
- Detail oriented to ensure accurate and reliable implementation of communication strategies.
- Thorough command of the technology associated with social media and the digital world (from the evolving social web to mobile tools and trends), sophisticated client service and digital communications skills, and high level of energy and passion with respect to this area of rapid change and innovation.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills. Excellent editing skills.
- Critical thinking and excellent analytical skills to enable immediate and appropriate assessment of complex issues of concern to stakeholders including among others, the media, the public, and funders.
- Strong organizational skills coupled with proven ability to effectively document work, handle multiple tasks, and excel in a fast-paced environment characterized by changing priorities and short deadlines.
- Flexibility to adapt to unexpected and time sensitive demands.
- Highly developed people management and leadership skills with demonstrated ability to develop and support a professional, service and continuous improvement focused workplace culture.
- Ability to think and act strategically, creatively and dynamically in a high-pressure work environment.
- Ability to manage confidential and sensitive materials and situations with the utmost discretion.
- Ability to deal professionally with tension and conflicts.
- Must be confident, organized and an accomplished problem solver.
- Ability to make decisions with good judgment and with acute sensitivity to the political environment and to the reputation of the University.

Nature and Scope

- **Contacts:**

Internally, communicates regularly and professionally advises and consults with all senior leaders including the President, and with all employees in all groups and departments to inform, influence, educate and collaborate and to promote and build the University's profile. Externally, this position

must maintain strong relationships with journalists locally, nationally and internationally and with stakeholders at all levels in partner organizations.

- **Level of Responsibility:**

The Director, Media Relations and Issues Management is responsible for leading a wide variety of communications staff across the University in dealing with the media. The incumbent will possess proven ability, extensive experience and strong working knowledge and understanding of integrated marketing and communication strategies within a highly complex institution and competitive marketplace and the role of communication and marketing in achieving the University's stated goals. The position is expected to bring innovative approaches and new concepts and models to communication programs. Requires a deep understanding of the issues facing the post-secondary education sector and the ability to interpret these factors into insightful communication in support of senior leaders and the University. Engage in communication of highest quality, which reflects and affects the reputation of the university in local, national and international spheres. Manage budget and finance processes for the integrated communications team in line with University practices. The position will be in a leadership role in emergency, crisis and issues management situations.

- **Decision-Making Authority:** Responsible and accountable for establishing the priorities for strategic communication programs and addressing the changes to strategic business plans by consulting directly with the Associate Vice-President, Communications as appropriate. The position will independently make high-risk decisions that have significant consequences on the reputation of the University and on the campus community.

- **Physical and Sensory Demands:** Minimal demands typical of a position operating within an office environment; periods of extensive sitting and concentrated use of visual senses. This position requires outstanding customer service, sound judgment, a strong work ethic, calm demeanor, ability to work under very challenging time constraints, constant interruptions and competing priorities.

- **Working Environment:**

Moderate exposure to disagreeable conditions typical of a position exposed to stress and pressure associated with management-level responsibilities with significant public and campus scrutiny and potential for impact on the university's reputation. Media inquiries and issues affecting the university occur at any time. As a result, work outside the stated operating hours of the University is normal in this role.