



Communications Guide

Policies and Procedures for Campus Communication

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Introduction

The Office of Communications advocates for SUNY Cobleskill. The Office's mission is to enhance the College's public image, increase awareness of SUNY Cobleskill's accomplishments, and assure consistency of image and quality in all College communications. The Office of Communications works to build and strengthen relationships with local media outlets and other organizations; answers outside inquiries; assists the campus community with the process of providing information; promotes the SUNY Cobleskill brand by effectively implementing communications strategies; and provides creative services and guidance.

Institutional image is the sum total of all information and experiences that stakeholders have with an institution. Every contact between institution and stakeholder builds that image, for better or worse, and will influence stakeholder willingness to either provide or withhold support for the institution – as a prospective student, prospective employee, donor, corporate partner, or legislator.

The reputation of SUNY Cobleskill depends, in part, upon how the College is perceived, thus it is critical that identity be consistently communicated to all stakeholders and constituents. SUNY Cobleskill's Office of Communications is charged with:

- Assisting the campus community with the process of providing information;
- Influencing opinion and promoting understanding of the mission and programs of the College;
- Promoting the SUNY Cobleskill brand by consistently and effectively implementing communications strategies;
- Providing creative services and guidance.

In order to enhance SUNY Cobleskill's reputation and image, the Office of Communications is responsible for assuring consistency of image and quality in all College communications. The Office's goal is to assist constituents in communicating their messages to intended audiences in a professional and cost-effective manner.

Communications Staff

Jason Politi
Director of Communications
politiji@cobleskill.edu
518-255-5631

Mohamed Baligh
New Media Specialist
saeedmq@cobleskill.edu
518-255-5473

Kathryn Flanagan
Graphic and Visual Communications Designer
terrykh@cobleskill.edu
518-255-5547

Jennifer Schorf
Graphic and Visual Communications Designer
schorfjm@cobleskill.edu
518-255-5640

Media Contact Policy

Inquiries from the press should be immediately referred the Director of Communications. Depending on specific circumstances, the President or Director of Communications may designate another College representative to serve as spokesperson.

Members of the faculty and staff may receive requests from the media regarding their research, scholarship, teaching or professional expertise. In such cases, faculty and staff are asked to notify the Director of Communications at the time of the request and before responding. Notification allows for vetting of the request and a coordinated response. It also assists the Office of Communications in building relationships with various media and highlighting the College's notoriety.

Should a member of the media contact an employee and ask to speak about SUNY Cobleskill or anything pertaining to the manner in which SUNY Cobleskill has, plans to, or currently conducts its business, the inquiry should be referred to:

Jason Politi
Director of Communications
politiji@cobleskill.edu
518-255-5631

When a Reporter Calls

Guidelines for communicating with the media when the issue is non-controversial and limited to the faculty/staff member's area of expertise:

- Consult with the Director of Communications prior to answering any inquiries. We are here to help.

- Obtain the name of the person calling, the media organization, and contact information if possible. Notify the Director of Communications with applicable information to determine if you will respond or if the Office of Communications
- Do not feel compelled to conduct a phone or in-person interview, or to answer questions right then and there. You may ask the reporter for time to gather your thoughts and to e-mail specific questions. Consult with the Director of Communications prior to answering questions.
- Do not speculate. It's OK to not know the answer to a question and to say "I don't know but let me look at that and get back to you." Avoid "no comment," as it often has a negative connotation.
- Make sure the reporter understands your answers. In many cases, you are the expert educating the reporter and, in turn, the media outlet's audience.
- Remember that you are representing SUNY Cobleskill. Personal opinions should be clearly and carefully identified as such.
- Do not say anything you would not want published, even if you think you are speaking "off the record."
- Issues that should not be discussed with reporters include legal issues, personnel issues, matters of university integrity, campus crises or emergency situations. Refer all such inquiries to the Director of Communications.
- Any inquiries involving specific students are subject to FERPA regulations (see FERPA section) and should be directed to the Office of Communications.

Press Coverage

You can assist the Office of Communications get the story out about exciting developments at SUNY Cobleskill. Use the information in this section to make the most of our media distribution services.

We consider the same news values taught to every reporter and editor. The ones that most concern us are:

Timeliness

- Something upcoming, that just happened, or is happening now.
- We need to know in advance so we can get the word out to appropriate media outlets and get reporters here if appropriate and possible.
- If something newsworthy is about to happen, please let us know as far in advance as possible.

Impact

- Addresses the question, “Who is this important to?” The more people affected, the more newsworthy.
- For us, it means capitalizing on trends like farm-to-table and STEM, highlighting initiatives or events that have community or regional implications, or addressing state or national issues.
- Note: It is our job to view this from the eyes of reporters and editors. We know there are lots of reasons more people *should* care about lots of things — and sometimes we can make that case. But we need to be realistic with our expectations and pitches.

Novelty

- First. Only. Best. Unusual.

Human Interest

- These are just good, person-focused stories. Other News Values of Less

Press Releases or Blog Posts

If a story fits one or more of those criteria, a press release may be appropriate. We have a variety of curated distribution lists for different topics to get the news to the most receptive audience. If the event/news item has already happened or is mostly of interest within the SUNY Cobleskill community, we will write it up as a website article and push it out via social media.

What We Need to Know

- Advance notice of an event or activity
- Basic details: who, what, where, when, why, how
- Photos, if applicable

How to Tell Us

- Use the *Communications & Marketing Request Form* on our office web page to make a formal request and initiate the discussion
- Email or call Jason Politi, Director of Communications to make a similar request

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA)

College students' rights or privacy and access regarding their educational records are articulated in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), commonly known as the Buckley Amendment. The Act helps protect the privacy of student records by requiring that institutions limit the disclosure of information from these records to third persons, notify students (or their parents, if dependency has been established) of the rights to review the student educational records and the right to seek correction of information contained in the records.

The Buckley Amendment deals only with educational records. Its provisions extend protection to students enrolled or formerly enrolled in higher education institutions regardless of whether they are 18 years old. Except in the case of dependent students, parents have no access to the records of students in post-secondary institutions. Although FERPA provides students the opportunity to challenge the accuracy of their educational records, it does not permit students to challenge grades or other evaluations of academic performance.

Institutions must allow individuals to inspect their transcripts and other educational records, but they are not required by FERPA to issue to students certified copies of students' transcripts. Institutions also may withhold copies of the transcripts of students who have defaulted on college loans or who have not met their financial obligations to the institutions. Harmful and improper university disclosure of a student's record may sustain a claim of violation or privacy rights in states whose laws extend the right of privacy to student records. Inquiries regarding this policy and requests for a complete policy statement are to be directed to the Office of the Registrar, Knapp Hall 101, 518-255-5521.

SUNY Cobleskill has designated directory information, according to FERPA as Amended, to be the student's: 1) full name; 2) campus or local address; 3) local telephone number; 4) home address; 5) major; 6) department; 7) dates of attendance; 8) date(s) of graduation; 9) degree(s) awarded; 10) awards; 11) full-time/part-time status; 12) birth date; and 13) e-mail address. This information can be released with prior written consent from the student. All other educational records will be released only under compliance with FERPA. Students currently enrolled at SUNY Cobleskill may object to the release of certain categories of "directory information" pertaining to them by providing written notification to the Office of the Registrar, Knapp Hall 101, within 14 days following the first day of classes each semester.

Emergency situations will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Freedom of Information Law (FOIL)

New York State's Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) pertains to the public's right to review certain government records. The Committee on Open Government is an office of the New York State Department of State, and it oversees all aspects of FOIL across the state.

Some information may be downloaded directly from the SUNY Cobleskill website, or information can be requested via the United States Postal Service or via email. Whenever possible, SUNY Cobleskill will supply electronic records in response to email requests. All record requests should be as specific as possible so that the College may easily identify which records maintained by SUNY Cobleskill are responsive to the inquiry.

All FOIL requests may be addressed to:
Jason Politi, Director of Communications
Knapp Hall 226
SUNY Cobleskill
Cobleskill, NY 12043
518-255-5631
Politijj@cobleskill.edu

Frequently Asked Questions

What happens to requests when received?

Requests are date stamped and recorded for our records and the department or office responsible for the records sought is notified of a request for those records. The department or office will then identify and locate the records requested. These are reviewed responsiveness to the request and compliance with the Freedom of Information Law. The materials are duplicated and sections that are determined to be non-releasable are blacked out. Dated or lengthy records may take some time to assemble.

How soon can I expect an answer?

The records access officer will mail or email the requestor an acknowledgement within five business days of receipt of the request and advise that the requestor may expect a response within 20 business days. If notice of completion of the request has not been received within 20 business days, the requestor should contact the records access officer listed above.

What items are exempt from disclosure?

Article 6 of the Public Officers Law, Section 87, includes nine conditions for denial of access. Some of the most common requests that involve exemption from disclosure are:

- Anything that may result in an unwarranted invasion or personal privacy. For example: home telephone numbers, home addresses, and Social Security numbers;
- Trade secrets –records that if released could cause harm to the competitive position of a business or enterprise;
- Information gathered for law enforcement purposes which, if disclosed, could interfere with due process;
- Lists of names and addresses which would be used for commercial or fundraising activities.

Please be advised that the Freedom of Information Law pertains to access to existing records. SUNY Cobleskill is not required to create a record containing information sought when one does not exist, or to compile existing records.

What if I want to appeal a determination that some or all of the records that I have requested are being withheld?

Where SUNY Cobleskill does not timely respond to a FOIL request, or if a request for access to records has been denied in whole or in part, an appeal may be filed with the FOIL Appeals Officer. An appeal should be sent in writing to the following address:

FOIL Appeals Officer
State University of New York
University Plaza
Albany, NY 12246
Phone: 518-473-1825

Once an appeal is received, the FOIL Appeals Officer will mail an acknowledgement of its receipt to the individual filing the appeal. The FOIL Appeals Officer will conduct an independent review of the records that were withheld.

The FOIL Appeals Officer will issue a final determination. If the determination is to release records, the individual filing the appeal will be notified of the cost of reproducing the records and, alternatively where they may review the records.

Social Media Policy

The State University of New York and SUNY Cobleskill encourage the appropriate use of social media to communicate ideas and information and as part of the educational mission. This policy governs employees of SUNY Cobleskill and the behavior of individuals as they utilize a variety of social media technologies and is not limited to any specific media format.

This policy does not govern personal use of social media on personal time. However, individuals may not make statements or take actions at any time on social media that violate applicable law or SUNY policy. Violating actions or statements over social media with a nexus to State employment may be governed by SUNY policy.

Personal use of social media on State time is governed by the New York State Public Officers Law and other federal, State and Local laws; the State University of New York Acceptable Use Policy as issued by the Office of Administrative Systems; and SUNY Human Resources policies.

Unless specifically authorized by the Office of Marketing & Branding, no SUNY Cobleskill employee may create an “official” SUNY presence on any form of social media, now in existence, or created in the future, or represent themselves as a spokesperson or authorized representative of SUNY Cobleskill. Faculty or staff using a SUNY Cobleskill email address to create or post comments to social media platforms, or who reference their professional affiliation to SUNY Cobleskill, should include the following disclaimer: ***The comments and/or postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily reflect SUNY Cobleskill's opinion, strategies or policies.***

SUNY Cobleskill's Office of Communications utilizes various social media platforms to present information and content to the public and receive feedback from the public and the SUNY Cobleskill community. Content and information released on social media is equivalent to content and information released to the press and the public in any other format, including press releases, letters to the media, open letters to the public, etc. Care must be taken that content and information released over social media is accurate, does not violate applicable laws (including, but not limited to, copyright, trademark, and defamation law) or SUNY policy.

Official SUNY Cobleskill social media may allow members of the public to comment or react to posted content and information. Employees of SUNY Cobleskill acting in their personal capacity may post or comment anonymously or identifiably.

SUNY Cobleskill invites discussion of important ideas and issues through social media. However, SUNY Cobleskill reserves the right to remove posts or comments that are obscene, defamatory, offensive, contain threats of violence, abusive, spam or advertising, or unrelated to the content or information. SUNY Cobleskill also reserves the right to remove posts or comments that violate applicable laws including, but not

limited to, copyright and trademark, or those that violate the use policies promulgated by the applicable social media provider.

SUNY Cobleskill's use of social media is governed by Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which provides a safe harbor for Internet Service Providers and websites for activity that takes place on said sites, provided that the site or domain takes certain actions when legally required.

Coby Now

Coby Now is SUNY Cobleskill's daily e-newsletter for faculty and staff. Distributed by the Office of Marketing & Branding, Coby Now includes college-related news and notes for members of the campus community. To submit information for Coby Now, please use the link at the bottom of any Coby Now issue.

SharePoint Policy

SUNY Cobleskill's Employee and Student Sharepoint is to be used exclusively for the posting of College-related events, activities, programs, and news sponsored by academic or administrative departments. The College also offers a Community Events section on Sharepoint dedicated to promoting events sponsored by not-for-profit organizations or government/state agencies supporting community enhancement initiatives.

SUNY Cobleskill reserves the right to deny any posting deemed inconsistent with the College's mission and will not promote political or illegal activities. Access to Employee Sharepoint and other electronic resources of SUNY Cobleskill is contingent on the use being in accordance with the policies of the College. Failure to adhere to the stated policy may result in access being denied in the future.

Route 7 Electronic Sign Policies and Procedures

The electronic message center located at the main campus entrance will be used to welcome visitors to campus (for example, "Welcome Accepted Students"), to publicize events which are open to the public (concerts, gallery shows, special events, Homecoming Weekend, etc.), and to provide brief instructions to those arriving for events ("New students check in at your residence hall"). The sign may only be used for publicizing college-related events.

The Office of Student Affairs is responsible for editing requests and placing announcements on the sign. Requests should be submitted by

emailing THORINSL@cobleskill.edu at least seven days prior to the dates on which the message will run. Please provide all information about the event you wish to promote.

The Office of Student Affairs will determine the format and phrasing of the message. The use of animation must be limited due to memory restrictions and will be determined by the Office of Student Affairs. Not all requests can be honored. When there are conflicting requests, the Office of Student Affairs will determine postings.

Social Media Guidelines for Student Clubs and Organizations

To maintain a consistent and positive public image of SUNY Cobleskill and all its related activities, the Office of Marketing & Branding sets the following guidelines for social media use.

Facebook Pages v. Facebook Groups

A Facebook Page is public and works much like an individual profile. Posts and comments can generally be seen by anybody. Facebook Groups can be private. If a club is more interested in member communication than public promotion, we recommend using Group, not a Page.

If you decide to use a public page, understand that the page's content is a reflection of SUNY Cobleskill and should remain positive and professional. The guidelines below apply primarily to public pages, but anything published online should be regarded as public information.

- The club should designate one Social Media Manager to be responsible for the club's social media account. This person should monitor the account regularly (at least once a day) to ensure there is no profanity, slurs, or other negative content. In cases of uncertainty with a particular post or comment, err on the side of caution.
- The Club Advisor should play an oversight role in monitoring the club's social media content.
- The Social Media Manager should answer questions (messages or comments) carefully and respectfully, always mindful that they are a reflection of the College. Defer to the Club Advisor in cases of uncertainty.
- The Social Media Manager should have the contact information for Jason Politi, Director of Communications.
 - politiji@cobleskill.edu
Office: 518-255-5631
Cell: 518-475-8038
- The club should grant administrator privileges on its club page or group to the SUNY Cobleskill main Facebook page.

- Use the hashtag #SUNYCobleskill in all posts so they will be more visible to Communications staff to share when appropriate. Keep other hashtag use professional and appropriate.
- Do not tag individuals in posts without their consent.
- The Office of Marketing & Branding can choose to un-publish a page temporarily when it is inactive.