

Has Time Gone Out the Window When Pitching Editors and Reporters?

Kristine Maloney, Assistant Vice President, TVP Communications

Cristal Steuer, Senior Strategist, TVP Communications

Many higher ed communicators have not had the opportunity to proactively pitch faculty experts, op-eds or feature stories recently because issues related to COVID-19 and systemic racism have necessitated a constant focus on crisis communications.

Neither of these issues are going away soon, but as the new semester begins (whether online or in-person), and a new crop of high school students begin the college application process, it will be increasingly important to find ways to highlight institutional mission, faculty expertise and successful solutions to the situations currently facing campuses.

We consider ourselves among the lucky ones who, in the midst of colliding crises, have been able to continue to pitch faculty expertise and op-eds. And we've noticed some changes. For most of our careers we've worked by rules based on newsroom schedules that guided when to send pitches. But with most reporters now working from home—juggling news that is changing by the minute with family obligations—the mid-morning pitch may have gone out the window. Barring breaking news, is there a new best time to pitch editors and reporters?

For one particular piece, we had luck corresponding with an editor at 7 a.m. We also had an editor get back to us at 2:30 a.m., in the same time zone. Normally, we would never pitch on a Friday afternoon, but recently late Friday pitches receive responses that day or over the weekend. We recently asked a

few of the journalists we work with regularly how their work has changed and how we can best help support them during a time of furloughs, layoffs and working from home.

One editor at a national business outlet said she is trying to keep normal 9-5 work hours and shares that she likes receiving pitches during regular work hours rather than late in the evening. Another commentary editor said he's getting more pitches than before. "That means it's doubly important to make sure the crux of the pitch is at the top of your email and it's easy to understand. And as always, I want to know what the piece will be about, not the headline/teaser," he shared.

A reporter at a national education outlet said he finds himself responding to inquiries later in the evening now than he might have done in the past. "The lines between 'work time' and 'home time' do seem a little more blurred than in the past," he shared. A commentary editor at a national publication said, "Editors (probably just like communications people) always feel like they are working all the time. Personally, I'm sticking pretty much to my normal hours but doing some more work late at night because there's a child at home during the day," she explained.

As one higher education reporter put it, "My work hours are all over the place. I guess I am more likely to see an email that comes early in the day, but [time has] all gone out the window."

One thing is definite, editors are being inundated with pitches and written pieces. Op-eds we would have expected to place in a couple days are taking weeks as journalists catch up with their inboxes. This has been the case since the earliest weeks of the pandemic and requires written pieces to meet an even higher bar, as we wrote about in this piece for Inside Higher Ed's Call to Action blog.

We both work from home with children and understand time

constraints; we have started to feel like sending a pitch at 7 a.m. is fine if it works for us, and editing a piece after the kids go to bed works if it will make our next day a little easier. While adjusting to new hours, we are just happy faculty and staff with expertise and possible solutions to the issues we are facing continue to share their scholarship.

About the Authors:



Kristine Maloney

Kristine has forged strong relationships with members of the national print and broadcast media on a wide range of beats. Her work with college administrators and faculty has helped to establish them as leaders among their peers and in the media. And her passion for sharing student perspectives and stories has contributed to measurable enhancement of their institutions' national profiles.

In her role at TVP Communications, Kristine also serves as a co-editor and contributor for the Inside Higher Ed blog, Call to Action, which explores the marketing and communications for higher education and the collegiate experience through a variety of industry voices.

Prior to joining TVP Comms, Kristine built and managed a comprehensive media and public relations program at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass. She also served for a time as the associate web editor at Holy Cross, where she was responsible for strategic content planning, branding

and message development.



Cristal Steuer

After spending four years as a writer and producer—and a stint running the teleprompter—in television newsrooms in both Boston and Springfield, Mass., Cristal entered the world of higher education media relations and never looked back.

Cristal brings more than 15 years of experience in higher education media and public relations, strategic communications, and storytelling to clients of TVP Communications. As one of the agency's star pitchers, her tenacity and timeliness help her find success when sharing trend stories and research and scholarship of faculty and senior administrators with a wide range of journalists and editors across the country. With a good sense for compelling narratives and the ability bring faculty expertise to the forefront, she has secured placements with ABC's *Good Morning America*, NBC's *Today*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Fortune.com*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, NPR, *Inside Higher Ed* and the *Associated Press*, among others.

Prior to joining TVP Comms, Cristal set new standards for the strategic media relations and communications team at the College of the Holy Cross. For six years she worked as the media relations manager beside Kristine, and eventually took over the national media relations and communications program for her last three years on campus.