

**The University of Georgia**  
**2009 Academic Affairs Faculty Symposium**  
Unicoi Conference Center  
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**Panel 1: *Communications and External Affairs***

John Greenman, Steve Wrigley, Kelly Simmons and Marcus Fechheimer (Moderator)

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**John Greenman**

*Carter Professor of Journalism*

If the University wants to improve communication with the public – a worthy goal – it should begin by benchmarking performance against best practices.



In a discussion with external affairs officials a year ago, I asked whether the University has done so. Years earlier, perhaps, was the answer, but not recently. And not since the discussion, as I understand.

Best-practices research and benchmarking are well-understood tools for improving performance.

- Used in the for-profit sectors
- Common among educational institutions, large and small, public and private
- Indeed, underpins the work of education support organizations like CASE – Council for Advancement and Support of Education
- Do it yourself or outsource to a vendor

Keys to success:

- Improvement process
- Discover, incorporate best practices
- Achieve results comparable to “best in class”

Caveat: Proceed only if you know you’re not the best, and want to get better. Insecure, defensive personalities shouldn’t do this.

Smart to await results before advancing recommendations, so I won’t. But here are a few areas for observations and ideas related to one public: news organizations that influence policy makers and opinion leaders.

- Better understand how UGA is portrayed in the news
- Look for ways to make the UGA News Service more strategic, especially with respect to experts
- Collaborate with journalism and public relations experts within UGA and media study centers outside UGA

- Widen market visits. Visits by President Adams and Dean Sumichrast seen as effective. Earlier, visits by Professor Bachtel also seen as effective. Who else should be “on the road” for UGA?
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**Steve Wrigley**

*Vice President for Government Relations and  
Director of the Carl Vincent Institute of Government.*

Purpose/function of the Office of Government Relations

- Build and maintain relations with federal, state, and local officials
- Help administrators and faculty to meet their academic goals and fill needs
- Respond to constituent/client/key supporters inquiries and needs

Why does this matter?

- UGA is a public institution and relies heavily on public agencies for financial and legal support
- We do not take these relationships or this support for granted
- As a public entity we are answerable to the public and public officials
- It is far better to be proactive and transparent in our relationships rather than separating ourselves
- Public officials help UGA significantly – general funding support, specific support, access to information, outlets for faculty expertise, opportunities for students (internships, jobs, etc)
- Almost all construction projects and renovations rely to some degree on public funding

Activities of the Office

- Regular contacts with elected and appointed officials
- Campus visits for briefings on issues, initiatives, needs
- Host receptions in Atlanta and Washington DC
- Host local commissioners and mayor on campus
- Respond to extensive number of inquiries on every possible topic
- Coordinate closely with Board of Regents offices since we are part of the university system.
- Advocate for the University’s teaching, research and service agenda
- Advocate for specific University needs, from faculty pay to construction needs to legislation needed to protect donors to opposing legislation which would interfere with stem cell research, etc.

Agenda for the office is set by the University’s academic agenda.

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**Kelly Simmons**

Editor, *Georgia Magazine*

My contribution to the panel discussion is to offer suggestions for reaching the public. One of my key points is that information distributed solely through the media is no longer reaching the mass audiences that it once was. Fewer reporters are covering the university and those that are have a number of other responsibilities that prevent them from spending the time to come onto campus and pursue stories.

We have to be more proactive in reaching out to the public. We can do that through institutional publications, like *Georgia Magazine*, which is distributed to our core audience of alumni and supporters, through web sites and through our university-owned television station. Most departments have a communications representative who can assist them in promoting stories. They don't know what faculty are doing unless someone tells them.

A great way to build goodwill toward the university is by visiting communities in Georgia, particularly those in south Georgia which often feel disenfranchised from the flagship university. The Archway Project has received a lot of positive feedback in the communities where its faculty and students have been active. Residents in these communities recognize that UGA serves them beyond the education it provides students here in Athens.