

# Communications Advisory Committee (CAC)

## Meeting Minutes

December 18, 2019

**Present:** Dorene S. Markel (Committee Chair), Kallie Michels, Vice President for Communications, Lee Doyle (Director of Communications Administration), Deirdre Spencer (SACUA Liaison), Amanda Thatcher (Medical School), Stephanie Preston (LSA-Psychology), Amanda Halbert (Athletics-Development), Chandan Kumar-Sinha (Michigan Medicine), Kalli Federhofer (LSA - German), Marieka Kaye (Library).

**Absent:** Gabrielle Hall, John Pasquale, Kayla Niemann

**Guest Presenters:** Pat Sellinger, Chief Freedom of Information Officer and Rick Fitzgerald, director, Public Affairs and Internal Communications.

After approval of the minutes from the last meeting, Pat Sellinger was introduced. Pat is the Chief Freedom of Information Officer for the university, and oversees a three-person staff that receives and responds to all of the requests to the university made under the Freedom of Information Act.

Since the university is considered a public body, it (and its employees) are subject to Michigan's Freedom of Information Act, which has been effective since 1976. Under the act, anyone can request that we turn over any "public record", which is anything in writing that is retained in association of the performance of the work of the university. A record can be physical or online, including emails, videos and texts. All work-related "writings", even if created on and originating from a personal account, are subject to disclosure under FOIA.

Pat described the strict statutory time frames under which the university is required to respond to sometimes voluminous requests made under FOIA. We respond within 5 business days after receiving the request in our office by either providing the materials, issuing a letter denying the request (because the requested materials don't exist or fall under an exemption to disclosure), or by requesting a 10-business day extension.

There are some records that are exempt from disclosure. Pat outlined several exemptions, which are shown on the attachment.

Under the statute, the university can charge actual costs. We charge as little and as seldom as possible, mainly just to compensate for the time to respond to voluminous requests. Around 80% of our requests are answered at no cost.

Rick Fitzgerald manages a 6-person unit that performs issues management and crisis communications on behalf of all campus units. His unit handles media inquiries directed at

central administration. They triage requests and get back to media with responses, meeting their deadlines.

Public Affairs also launches some presidential initiatives, handing them off when a dedicated communications person is eventually hired.

The unit works closely with Michigan Medicine, Athletics and LSA and other schools with assigned communicators, building a relationship to allow quick handling of issues as they arise.

You can see their Key Issues page off of the Gateway (through a link on the "About" tab or at <https://publicaffairs.vpcomm.umich.edu/key-issues/>). This site has information on recurring issues, resources, news and updates. Key issues are shown by year.

The spokespersons who speak to the press on behalf of the university are Rick and associate director Kim Broekhuizen. The unit offers tips to prepare for an interview with the press, as does Michigan News. The public affairs unit deals frequently with emergency communications, attends emergency preparedness exercises that include Flint and Dearborn campuses and Michigan Medicine.

Public affairs will be highly involved in preparedness and issue anticipation and planning for the 2020 Presidential Debate. They will hear concerns and develop communications that help campus with any disruption, and help schools think about academic programming to coincide.

Rick was invited to return to the April 8 meeting to talk more about the debate and free speech.

The next meeting is on January 28. It was decided that we would invite Laura Lessnau (director, Michigan News) and Nikki Sunstrum (director, U-M Social) to join us to do media training.

The meeting was adjourned.