



UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTH CAROLINA
WILMINGTON

Storytelling:

Sharing the Soul
(and Goals)

of Your Organization
by Focusing on Your People

For the Love of the Story

Thanks, Granny Mabe.

- She knew how to spin a good yarn.
- She made growing up in a small Southern town sound like a wonderful adventure.
- I connected to her – and her generation – through the power of her stories.
- My favorite story from her collection – the Can of “Spag-et-hi”

From Hearing Granny's Tales to Reading Great Writers

Discovering the Soul of a Good Story

- Laura Ingalls Wilder
- Jane Austen
- Mark Twain
- Lee Smith
- Toni Morrison
- Charles Frazier
- Clyde Edgerton
- Rick Bragg
- Jim Jenkins



“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” – Maya Angelou



The Science Behind the Soul of Storytelling

There are reasons why this form of communication has lasted for 20,000 years.

- Storytelling promotes a neurological response.
- The appeal of the people in the story – the depth of our connection to them – causes the release of oxytocin, a “feel-good” chemical that promotes **empathy** and **understanding**.
- Other research shows that happy endings trigger the limbic system – our brain’s “reward center” – to release dopamine, which makes us feel more **hopeful** and **optimistic**.

Research source: “The Irresistible Power of Storytelling as a Strategic Business Tool”

The Harvard Business Review

HBR source: Paul Zak, neuroeconomist



Our Goals with WE ARE UNCW

Telling our story, one Seahawk at a time.

- We want people to feel something – pride, loyalty, hope, inspiration, respect, curiosity – when they read our stories.
- We want to create connections among segments of the UNCW community, such as:
 - Students and alumni
 - Faculty and staff
 - Donors and students, faculty and staff



Promoting Pride Among Our People

A little recognition often goes a long way.

- Recognize our faculty and staff
 - Celebrate their success, dedication, loyalty, discovery, etc.
- Promote our alumni
 - Sing their praises... *and* the university's.
- Focus on our donors and friends
 - Strengthen our community connections.
- Celebrate our students
 - Champion our core mission.



Celebrating the Diversity of Our Community

Many faces, one mission.

- Show the faces of UNCW.
- Select people of various age ranges, backgrounds, interests and roles.
- Represent the individuals who form our community.
- Remind various demographics that UNCW is not insular; we're an active part of the present – and the future – of Southeastern North Carolina, the state and, in some cases, the world.



We Are UNCW

Telling our story, one Seahawk at a time.



Amelia Johnson
Junior, Semester by the Bay Program Participant

- Students
-
- Faculty & Staff
-
- Alumni
-
- Friends



Amelia Johnson
Junior, Semester by the Bay Program Participant



The Floyd Family
The Floyd Family



Deloris Hansley
Event Manager, Department of Campus Life



David La Vere
Professor of History David La Vere



Selecting and Delivering the Stories

The tools of our trade.

- A solid list of prospects.
- A standard list of questions...
- ... that we don't always follow.
- A "bright" vs. an in-depth personality profile.
- A word limit.
- Catchy leads.
- Memorable endings.
- Action verbs.
- Numerous "channels" for sharing the stories.

Selecting the Prospects

Everyone has a story to tell, but some stories are better than others.

- The writers and editors in the Office of University Relations develop a list of interesting subjects based on our knowledge of the campus and tips from our sources.
- We work with the executive director and other members of the campus leadership team to “vet” candidates.
- We seek candidates to fit the stories we want to tell.
 - Right now, we’re shopping for December 2015 graduates to highlight.
- Set goals: we produce 30-40 new profiles each semester.
 - We wrote 12 for a single leadership edition of WE ARE UNCW.
- Maintain a working list of subjects.
 - We have 25 possibilities we are exploring, 15 approved profiles in motion and 3 completed ones ready to go.



Asking the questions

These stories are snapshots, not oil paintings.

- What excites you about your role as (a fill in the blank)?
- What makes UNCW special to you?
- What do you wish the general public knew about UNCW?
- Tell me about a goal or initiative you hope to pursue this year.
- What do you do for fun whenever you get a few minutes of free time?
- How do you like to start your day?
- What haven't I asked about that I should have asked about?
- Is there anything else you want to share?

Keeping things in perspective

You can't tell someone's life story in 250 words.

- WE ARE UNCW stories are “brights,” not in-depth personality profiles.
- We avoid reiterating biographical timelines.
- We focus on the positive.
- We give the subjects the opportunity to modify their comments --- within reason.

On Writing Well

William Zinsser's "classic" guide to writing nonfiction.

- Catchy leads and memorable endings – connect them if it works.
- Avoid purple prose – clear the clutter.
- Let your subjects speak for themselves – but not too much.
- Action verbs – avoid higher education-ese.
- Know your audience – and your channel(s).

These are few of my favorite things

Memorable lines from my favorite WE ARE UNCW profiles.

- (Beginning) As a master gardener, Wilmington native Elizabeth Dunn sees much more than pretty scenery when she tours the UNCW campus.
- (Ending) When Dunn's daughter graduates and begins teaching, she'll represent one more Seahawk planted in the community, ready to help future generations grow.
- (Great quote from an alumnus) "One thing I tell our interns is if you are not passionate about it, don't do it. Life is too short to work as many hours as you have to work in life and not enjoy what you are doing. It's not about the money; it's about the experience." – Brandon Beane '98, Carolina Panthers assistant general manager
- (Great quote from a doctoral student originally from China) Sarah Yang, who has more than 20 years of experience in teaching and administration in secondary and higher education, was so impressed with UNCW that she ultimately chose not to apply anywhere else. She said, "I found the one school where I felt welcomed."



Telling stories with soul is rewarding for the writer
in all of us
One of my favorite pieces...



Thinking visually

It turns out, a picture really is worth a 1,000 words.



More visuals

Fewer words needed.



Expanding to video

Good questions – and even better answers – required.



Sharing your stories

When and where will your work be published?

WE ARE UNCW profiles are published weekly during the fall and spring semesters to a web portal on the university's website.

From there, we distribute the profiles using the following channels:

- SWOOP, a weekly faculty and staff digital newsletter
- Community SWOOP, a weekly digital newsletter for regional media as well as key constituents
- New for 2015-16! A monthly Chancellor's newsletter.
- Social media
- Vimeo
- Other university web pages



Measuring your results

If you write it, will they read it?

- SWOOP's average readership: 42.5%
 - WE ARE profiles consistently among Top 10 "clicks" each week.
- Community SWOOP's average readership: 33.6%
 - WE ARE profiles consistently among Top 10 "clicks" each week.
- Chancellor's Newsletter's average readership: 42% among faculty, staff and key constituencies
 - WE ARE profiles among Top 5 "clicks" each month.
- The national average readership for educational newsletters: 22%
- Web hits range from a few hundred per profile to 12,000 for last year's Miss North Carolina.

Source for results: iContact; source for national average: MailChimp report, August 2015



Bonus Round

Writing these profiles = a great learning experience for interns.

The Office of University Relations encourages student interns to hone their skills by writing (and photographing) WE ARE UNCW profiles. Through this process, they learn how to:

- Set up interviews.
- Research subjects.
- Ask questions.
- Confirm facts.
- Write, accept constructive criticism, revise.
- Follow up with subjects.



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See more at www.uncw.edu/weareuncw.

Thank you for the opportunity to share a few stories with you.

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