Canadian Universities in the Media: Winter 2004

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About this study...

This media analysis study was conducted by Cormex Research. The study, begun on September 1, 1999, examined media coverage of the University of Toronto, Queen’s University, McGill University, University of Western Ontario, UBC, and University of Alberta in 12 major Canadian English-language daily newspapers and Canadian Business and Maclean’s Magazine, as well as coverage in key television outlets across the country and coverage on CBC-Radio and its affiliates.

Each university mentioned in a news article was coded for the following key variables: outlet, date, type of coverage (wire, editorial, etc.), prominence of mention (nine-point scale), source of university mention, tone of coverage, issue, faculty, appearance of university president, name of professor quoted (if applicable) and size of mention.

In addition, key messages concerning the depiction of each university in a news item were tracked. These key corporate messages included: academic performance, innovation and leadership, teaching, research, educational setting/environment and international aspects of the university.

For university mentions stemming exclusively from a professor being quoted as an expert on an issue unrelated to the university, the study tracked what topic the professor was quoted on (from a list of 32 different topics). These items were not coded for tone or key messages.

Print coverage is measured according to total audience readership as reported by NADBank. Readership was weighted by the prominence of the university mention in the news item based on a nine-point scale, such that brief references to a university are given only a fraction of the newspaper’s total readership. Broadcast exposure is based on findings from Nielsen Media Research and BBM Bureau of Measurement.

Equivalent advertising value is calculated by multiplying the agate line size of the university’s mention in an article by the MAL rate charged by the publication. Television ad rates are based on posted per 15 second rates for each newscast. A multiplier of three is applied to reflect the greater likelihood of an audience member witnessing a news item than an equivalent-sized advertisement.

Further quantitative findings are available on request.

Cormex Research is Canada’s leading media content measurement and analysis firm. Since its inception in 1989, it has brought its expertise and unique methods in evaluating public relations and communications effectiveness to Canada’s top private and public sector organizations.

For more information, contact Cormex Research, at 416.504.8236, by fax at 416.504.2838, or by e-mail at: analysis@cormex.com.
Executive Overview and Trend Analysis

The media profile of the University of Alberta over the course of the Winter 2004 semester remained at comparatively high levels. Volume of coverage rose 7% above levels witnessed last winter and remained marginally above the university’s per-semester average. However, all universities (except McGill) saw increased coverage compared to a year ago, which resulted in no change in UofA’s share of voice among the major universities surveyed. In fact, over the last five semesters, UofA’s share of total media exposure has remained relatively constant at approximately 14% – behind UofT by a noticeable amount, but proximate to both UBC and McGill.

While its share of total university exposure saw little change and its volume of coverage increased slightly, the composition of UofA’s coverage was different due to the university’s particular focus on research activities. During the Winter 2004 semester, UofA witnessed the most research-dominated media profile compared to other Canadian universities. Research coverage for the university during the last four months reached its highest level since tracking began in September 1999. Research activities (mostly from its medical staff, but also from other departments) comprised 45% of UofA’s total media profile this semester. To put this in context, research activities by other universities combined to account for only 24% of their total exposure. Over the last fourteen semesters surveyed, over one-third of UofA’s coverage has come from research, while only 24% of coverage from other universities is derived from research on average. Queen’s University rivals UofA in this regard with 32% of its coverage resulting from research activities, but other universities lag behind.

At the same time, coverage derived from expert quotes and op-ed submissions has been comparatively low for the university, and fell in Winter 2004 to its lowest level in the last sixteen months tracked. UofA placed only one professor among the top 30 this semester, compared to 16 for UofT, eight for McGill and three for UBC. UofA’s share of voice of all expert quotes has remained above its average over the last three semesters, but it is an area that the university may want to improve on in order to raise its total profile in the Canadian media.
Volume of Media Exposure

Key findings

Media coverage of the six Canadian universities surveyed during Winter 2004 rose by 7% above levels witnessed during the Winter semester of the previous academic year. Except for McGill, all universities witnessed an increase in volume of coverage during the semester compared to last year. Queen’s University witnessed the most significant gain in profile, as total exposure for the university increased by 26% above Winter 2003. The University of British Columbia witnessed the second highest gain, as its total exposure increased by nearly one-quarter. UBC also witnessed the greatest increase in share of voice, gaining two percentage points. However, the increase in coverage for UBC was led by attention to its admission that health researchers at the university had failed to comply with research ethics guidelines, as well as to a public dispute over the building of a student residence overlooking a well-known nude beach in Vancouver.

Coverage of the University of Alberta remained at the high level generated during Fall 2003 – a level that represented a 5% increase in exposure compared to a year ago, and was 13% higher than its average over the last fourteen semesters tracked. UofA’s share of total university exposure remained at 14%; there has been no significant change in UofA’s share of voice among major Canadian universities surveyed in the last five semesters. Coverage of UofA declined in the print media by 9% from Winter 2003, but increased on television by 20% and on radio by 50%. Attention to UofA in the Edmonton media declined by 16% from Winter 2003, but rose by 36% in the remaining outlets surveyed, including a 30% increase in the national media.


All universities except McGill saw coverage increase between Winter 2003 and Winter 2004. UBC posted the biggest overall increase, but this was the result of several controversies undermining the university’s profile. UWO and Queen’s were among the universities posting the biggest proportionate gains, led by expert commentary (for Queen’s) and funding announcements (for UWO).

UofA volume of coverage and share of voice by semester

UofA’s share of voice remained relatively static from Winter 2003 to this semester. The slight decrease in share of voice during Winter 2004 was a result of the increases witnessed by both Queen’s and UBC.
Examining coverage of the university over the course of the semester: key events

The highest peak period of coverage for UofA appeared during the final week of February, led by the six-part CanWest series by Margaret Munro entitled “Drugs, Money, and Ethics.” The final instalment of the series focused on the dismissal of research technician Jinhua Xu following the disclosure that Mr. Xu had falsified research findings and later attempted to cover up his actions by altering the work of his colleagues. The second-highest peak of coverage appeared during the second week of January, led by attention to the study on the use of statistical modelling to help control the West Nile virus.

Other universities

Queen’s University
Queen’s witnessed the second largest proportional increase in share of voice among the universities as well as the second-greatest increase in total exposure compared to Winter 2003, behind UBC. Coverage of Queen’s increased in both print and broadcast, most notably its profile on national radio, which was nearly double that witnessed during the Winter semester last year. Queen’s garnered the second highest share of voice on national radio among the six universities, trailing only the University of Toronto. While Queen’s share of voice did increase above last year, the university ranked sixth in the survey.

University of Toronto
The University of Toronto led in volume of exposure among the universities surveyed. The university’s media profile during Winter 2004 increased slightly above levels witnessed during the same period last year, but the university’s share of voice among the remaining universities declined slightly as a result of significant gains made by Queen’s and UBC. Coverage of UofT was at its highest during January, led by media attention to Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment’s proposal to build a stadium on the UofT campus, as well as to the university’s announcement that it had raised more than $1 billion in a six-year fund-raising drive.

McGill University
McGill was the only university among the six surveyed to witness a decline in total volume of coverage compared to Winter 2003. The decline reflected less coverage of research at McGill, which declined by 17% from last winter. Coverage of McGill was at its highest during April, led by expert commentary on federal politics and the pending federal election.

University of Western Ontario
The University of Western Ontario’s media profile increased by 10% above Winter 2003, as the university garnered its highest profile during a semester since Summer 2002. While UWO’s media exposure increased, its share of voice remained relatively static. The university’s gain in profile was mostly apparent in home market media outlets, but also increased slightly in the national media. Coverage of UWO was at its highest for the semester towards the end of March, led by attention to the $26 million gift from Seymour Schulich to the university’s medical school.

University of British Columbia
The University of British Columbia witnessed the greatest increase in coverage among the six universities, but the gains were led by unfavourable attention, as coverage critical of UBC comprised 15% of its total media profile during the semester. As a result of the increase, UBC’s share of voice also increased. Coverage of research at UBC declined by 26% from Winter 2003, but it witnessed both an increase in expert quotes and a rise in student issues, led by reports on the proposed student residence to overlook a nude beach, and several reports on student employment and tuition hikes.
Key findings

Unfavourable coverage of the six universities increased in comparison to Winter 2003, led by negative attention to the University of British Columbia. Nearly two-thirds of all negative coverage of the six universities surveyed was directed at UBC. Criticism of the university focused on three events: the public disclosure that the university had broken national research ethics guidelines for several years by failing to warn patients of all the dangers and side effects associated with medical experiments and drug trials; the allegation that the university reduced class sizes in an effort to improve its rank in Maclean's annual university survey; and the public dispute over the university’s plan to build high-rise student residences overlooking a clothing-optional beach in Vancouver.

The University of Alberta witnessed the third best ratio of negative to positive coverage among the six universities surveyed, as explicitly negative coverage comprised only 3% of UofA's profile, while positive coverage comprised 13% of the university’s total profile for the quarter. Negative coverage was almost exclusively a result of the CanWest series on research ethics in Canada and the report on untoward behaviour by former UofA researcher Jinhua Xu. Several medical research projects at UofA were sources of favourable coverage, particularly attention to the research team at UofA that isolated, cloned and reproduced the biological signal that controls production of extra-cellular matrix proteins, a discovery that could lead to scar-free healing.

Tone of media coverage by university: Winter 2004

UBC witnessed the lowest ratio of positive to negative coverage among the six universities, mostly as a result of a relatively high volume of negative attention to a breach in research ethics at the university.

UWO witnessed the best positive to negative ratio, as slightly more than one-third of the university’s profile was favourable, led by Seymour Schulich’s gift to UWO’s medical school.

Changes in UofA’s positive and negative coverage by semester

Explicitly favourable coverage for UofA declined this semester, following three semesters of comparatively high volume, to a level that was 20% below the university’s average over the previous four semesters. Negative volume increased over the last two semesters, but was 17% below the university’s per semester average.

Sources of positive coverage

By subject
- Research .................. 91%
- Operations ............. 7%
- Student issues ....... 3%

By faculty
- Science .................. 44%
- Medicine ................. 31%
- Arts ........................ 9%

Sources of negative coverage

By subject
- Research .................. 93%
- Operations ............. 7%

By faculty
- Engineering .......... 34%
- Science .................. 33%

*Excludes broadcast coverage and items generated by expert/ op-ed commentary.
Exposure from national media outlets

Key findings

The profile of UofA in the national media rose 28% above levels witnessed during Winter 2003, but its total share of national media coverage of all universities surveyed remained relatively static. UofA's profile rose the most in the Globe and Mail, which increased by 65% above the period during the previous academic year. However, UofA's profile in the National Post declined by 8%. Attention to UofA increased on national radio, as exposure on CBC-Radio One increased by a factor of two, led by coverage of research at the university. UofA's profile on national television fell by 20% from Winter 2003.

UofA's share of national media coverage declined for the second consecutive semester, but remained above levels witnessed during Winter 2003 and Winter 2002, and was marginally above its per semester average.

UofA garnered the fourth greatest share of national print coverage of the six universities, led by its profile in the Globe and Mail. However, UofA witnessed the second-lowest share of voice on national broadcast outlets. The university's profile was particularly low on national television, most notably on CTV.

The total volume of national media coverage devoted to the universities during Winter 2004 rose by 24% from levels witnessed during the Winter semester last year, as UBC and Queen's witnessed significant gains in profile at the national level. While UBC's share of national media coverage nearly doubled from Winter 2003, its profile was led by several high profile critical reports, most notably a six-part series by Margaret Munro in the National Post on research and ethics that stemmed from coverage of UBC's noncompliance with federal research ethics guidelines. UofT garnered the highest profile in the national media, but while its volume of coverage increased slightly, its total share of national coverage fell by ten percentage points.
Media Profile By Major Subject

Key findings
The increase in UofA's exposure during Winter 2004 was a result of elevated attention to research activities at the university. Research comprised 44% of the university's total profile, compared to its per-semester average of 35%, and volume of coverage featuring research at UofA rose by 75% from Winter 2003. Medical research comprised most of this increase, particularly studies on the safety of Viagra, the epidemiology of the West Nile virus, and the effects of physical activity on breast cancer risk. Coverage from expert quotes declined by 20% from the same period last year and, as a result, UofA's share of coverage from expert quotes among the six universities surveyed fell by a full percentage point. Op-ed submissions increased from Winter 2003 and comprised 7% of UofA's total media profile. Media attention to student issues at UofA declined, and consisted mostly of coverage of anti-plagiarism measures and tuition increases.

UofA media exposure over time by major subject

The media profile of research activities at UofA was the main area of growth for the university, as the total volume of coverage devoted to research at UofA reached its second-highest level in a semester since tracking began in September 1999.

At the same time, there was a decline in coverage derived from expert quotes and op-ed submissions compared to the previous four semesters.

University media exposure by major subject and tone for current semester

UofA captured a 24% share of voice in coverage of research activities among the six universities surveyed, the university's second-highest share since tracking began in Fall 1999, and second overall for the current semester.

UofT remained the dominant voice in all major subjects, but student issues at UofA garnered the highest profile on television, led by home market coverage on Global-Edmonton.

Percentages represent share of exposure within each issue.
Media Profile By Faculty

Key findings
The Faculty of Arts remained the most prominent among UofA's faculties, comprising 30% of the university's total profile for the semester. Media exposure for the Faculty of Arts was led by coverage of the Department of Political Science, particularly from Steve Patten's commentary on federal politics. The Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry garnered the second-highest profile during Winter 2004, led by attention to research activities within the faculty. The Faculty of Science garnered the next highest profile, also led by attention to research activities, most notably from Karlis Muehlenbachs' commentary on the research he co-authored that reported signs of microbial activity in 3.5 billion-year-old volcanic rock. The Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Home Economics garnered the fourth highest profile, led by attention to Tapan Basu's research on echinacea.

Comparing coverage by major faculties: current versus previous semesters

Arts: UofA's Faculty of Arts ranked fourth among all universities, consistent with its per-semester average.

Science: Due to the high profile of research activities at UofA, the Faculty of Science garnered the second-highest share of voice among universities, although its share was slightly below that witnessed during Winter 2003.

Business: The School of Business captured the lowest share of voice among the universities, as UofT's Rotman comprised nearly one-half of all business faculty coverage.

Law: The Faculty of Law garnered an identical share of voice as the law faculties at both Queen's and UWO. UofT appeared in more than one-half of all coverage, led by its commentary on legal issues and research on the Supreme Court of Canada.

Engineering: UofA's Faculty of Engineering garnered a 12% share of voice, consistent with its per-semester average

Medicine: The Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry at UofA captured the third-highest share of voice, due to heightened attention to research conducted by faculty.

Percentages represent share of exposure across Canada for each faculty by university. “Previous semesters” includes average share of coverage between September 1999 and December 2003.
Media Profile By Expert

Key findings

The media profile of university professors during Winter 2004 reached its highest level during a winter semester since tracking began, rising by 11% above levels witnessed during the same period of the previous academic year. The University of Toronto remained the leading institution, comprising 41% of all coverage of university professors, and placing 16 professors in the top 30 among the six universities. UBC’s Mary Lynn Young received the highest media profile during the semester as result of her recurring “View from B.C.” column in the Globe and Mail. UofT’s Nelson Wiseman was the second most prominent professor during the semester, stemming from commentary on the lead-up to the federal election campaign.

The profile of faculty with the University of Alberta rose above levels witnessed during Winter 2003, led by increased media attention to research activities (despite an overall decline in expert quotes). Post-doctoral Research Fellow Marjorie Wonham of the Center for Mathematical Biology generated the highest profile among UofA experts, stemming from her research devising an epidemiological model of the West Nile virus. Killam Memorial Professor of Ecology David Schindler was the second most prominent UofA expert, due to his op-ed submissions on the environment and commentary on the freshwater supply shortage facing Alberta.

Media exposure of key faculty

- **UofA TOP 30 - Winter 2004**

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- **UofA share over time**

UofA experts’ share of voice among the six universities has remained above-average for the university for the past three consecutive semesters.
Key messages

As part of the study, Cormex tracks the presence of several key messages in press coverage of the university. Charts below measure the volume of media exposure, both favourable and unfavourable, of each message over the last four semesters.

Does research at the university receive favourable coverage?

Favourable mentions of research activities at the University of Alberta rose above levels witnessed during the same period last year by nearly a factor of three, led by attention to research conducted by UofA geochemists Karlis Muehlenbachs and Neil Banerjee, who had found signs of microbial activity in 3.5 billion year-old rocks. The research was noted in reports to be "an important piece of scientific evidence in a field where concrete proof is hard to come by."

Is the university described as being innovative or a leader in Canada?

Portrayals of UofA as a leading institution in Canada increased for the third consecutive semester, led by attention to the School of Business following its placement in the Financial Times annual rankings, as well as to the Muehlenbachs and Banerjee research.

Does the university’s faculty and teaching staff receive favourable coverage?

Favourable portrayals of faculty members at UofA during Winter 2004 declined from the same period last year, but negative media exposure of UofA faculty rose, led by attention to former UofA researcher Jinhua Xu.
Other Key Indicators

Equivalent advertising value

The equivalent advertising value of coverage featuring UofA during the Winter 2004 semester was $4.5 million, compared to $3.5 million during the same period of the previous academic year.

In thousands of dollars, print and television coverage only, excluding negative print items.

UofA’s media exposure in the home market

UofA’s home market media profile declined 16% compared to Winter 2003, led by a 29% drop in exposure in the Edmonton Journal. UofA’s profile increased on most home market broadcast outlets, except on CBX-AM, which devoted 17% less airtime to the university than during Winter 2003.

Media exposure by topics covered by university faculty - Winter 2004

UofA witnessed its highest share of voice among all universities on technology-related topics, garnering a 16% share, led by attention to David Miall’s speech recognition software.

While political topics comprised the greatest share of UofA’s profile, the university witnessed a 10% share of voice among all universities.

As a result of heightened media attention to research at UofA, the university appeared in one-quarter of coverage of research for the semester, second only to UofT.

UofA also relied less on expert quotes for its media profile compared to other universities.

University of Alberta

<table>
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<th>Topic</th>
<th>% of UofA’s coverage</th>
<th>% UofA of all universities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Science</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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</table>

As a result of heightened media attention to research at UofA, the university appeared in one-quarter of coverage of research for the semester, second only to UofT.

UofA also relied less on expert quotes for its media profile compared to other universities.