

# IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Offices of University Relations and University Counsel

## Public Information Best Practices

Openness, responsiveness, timeliness



# Iowa State's culture

- Openness, responsiveness, timeliness
  - Info about activities and events is distributed via news media, internet, social media, publications, presentations, meetings.
  - President Leath delivers ISU news personally in travels around Iowa and the nation.
  - Iowa State employees are known for their prompt responses to requests from media, public, students.

# Testimonials

- "An extra slice of pumpkin pie ... for Iowa State University's News Service staff, who answer reporters' emails at all hours of the day and night, and on weekends, too."

*Ames Tribune's* annual Thanksgiving tradition of thanking the people for whom they are grateful, November 2011

- "(ISU News Service) saves our butts in the newsroom all the time."

Carol Hunter, senior news director, *The Des Moines Register*, March 2013

- "A quick note of thanks for all your help--and to the rest of your ISU team. We had a great show I can't thank you enough for accommodating our every need."

Cindy Smith, ABC News supervising producer, "*This Week*," August 2011

- "I just wanted to thank you again for how gracious and professional everyone at Iowa State was toward the media during the search for (a missing student). I've never seen a news service so together and so helpful as you were the past few days. We really appreciate everything."

Emily Price, KCCI-TV April 2007

# How Iowa State handles requests

- Nearly 1,500 media contacts in 2012 with the University Relations office.
  - Many other units also get media requests. University Relations handles most major media contacts.
- Actively pushing out information about key research, student and faculty achievements, major events, services and policies.
- Information requests from the general public flow into many university offices (University Relations, Admissions, Athletics, Registrar, Purchasing, Student Answer Center).
  - Responses are handled personally by staff in those offices.
- 250 public records requests (FOIs) annually at Iowa State.
  - Requests are handled by several units, ranging from Athletics to Academic offices. ([Public Records Requests procedures](#))
  - Because of many exemptions and increasing concerns about privacy, attorneys are often involved in advising and reviewing records requests.

# Public Records Requests (FOI)

## Key Elements of ISU's Approach to PRR's

- [Published guidance](#) for requesters of records and for those responding to requests all on one page.
- ISU does not have a gatekeeper on PRR's.
  - Requesters can ask directly to Units
  - Responders can respond directly
- Very few challenges to denial; We explain the reason.



- Homepage
- News Service
- Internal Communications
- Photography
- UR staff
- Public Records**
- News & features**
- News releases
- Inside Iowa State
- Regents updates
- Two Minutes archives

## Public Records Requests



As a public agency in Iowa, Iowa State University is subject to the [Iowa Public Records Law](#), Chapter 22 of the Iowa Code. Generally, documents held by government agencies are public. However, there are many exceptions, both statutory and court-made. These guidelines are intended to help members of the public understand the law and how it is applied at Iowa State University, and to help University units respond to these requests.

For access to records of the Iowa State University Foundation, please consult the separate [guidelines](#) created for the Foundation.

### Q&A on Public Records Requests

#### What is the Public Records Law?

The Public Records law is intended to ensure that state agencies and institutions are accountable to the citizenry. It broadly creates a presumption that records created and held by public agencies are public. At the same time, the law provides for protection of confidential and proprietary information.

#### What Rights do Requesters of Records Have?

Persons may examine and receive copies of records, unless they are exempt from disclosure. A person may request a copy of a record in person, in writing, by telephone or by electronic means. As indicated [below](#), the requester may be charged the actual cost for supervising the examination of records and for making, redacting and providing copies. The person cannot be required to give a reason for requesting the record or to put their request in writing, unless the person has requested certain confidential records.

#### Public Records Officer

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# To the Requester, Public Records Law is Simple—But It's Not Necessarily So

- We have to be comfortable that release is right regardless of the person asking.
  - Information we give to the press may very well create risk to the public if given to someone with ill will.
- At the same time as there have been demands on government for transparency, we have been flooded with demands for privacy:
  - Concern about identity theft, financial records
  - Medical Information (HIPAA)
  - Security (post 9/11)
  - In 1986 there were 20 Exemptions from Public Records. In 1996 there were 32. Today there are 64!

# Examples of Requests

- A newspaper asked to review all business transaction records of a coach when the unit was trying to close their books for the year.
- An Advocacy group asked for three years of e-mail of 50 University Faculty and administrators as well as résumés of faculty receiving tenure.
  - Student evaluations; Scholarly articles being reviewed; Patentable ideas
  - Thousands of pages of materials were reviewed, redacted and provided
  - 100 hours of work to comply



# Ready Access to Iowa State Info

- [www.iastate.edu/about/facts/](http://www.iastate.edu/about/facts/)
- Examples of what you can find under this link:
  - Iowa State Homepage
  - Directory
  - Admissions
  - Research and Economic Development
  - Financial Reports
  - News Service
  - Policy Library
  - Student Organizations