

Duke University - Communications office

User profile

Karl Leif Bates is the Director of Research Communications at Duke University. Karl and his team work with communications officers based across the Duke Campus to identify and promote key pieces of research to a broader audience. Karl reports to the Vice-President of Public Affairs and Government Relations, and he and his colleagues work closely with a number of other institutional departments, including the Research Office.

Institutional goals

Communicating the scholarly work undertaken by Duke faculty serves two objectives:

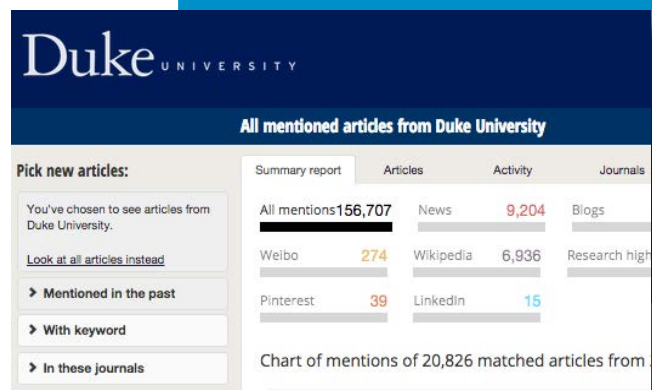
- One is to highlight Duke as a center of research excellence, and ensure that they are building the profile of the institution and its faculty.
- The second is to demonstrate and clearly communicate to the public the outcomes of the work funded by taxpayers, and help them get a better understanding of what is going on in science.

Key Stats

- 156,707 mentions of Duke research to date
- 982 references in public policy documents
- Over 2,000 mentions in the last month alone

Challenges

Karl and his team face a variety of challenges in realizing these objectives. It is very difficult, Karl says, to capture the public perception towards Duke – and therefore hard to measure if their outreach activity is having the desired effect. An increasingly ‘flat’ media world presents opportunities for the press team; people who would not look for articles on science are now presented them alongside the latest celebrity gossip – but it also means that they need to be careful to make sure the work isn’t taken out of context or misrepresented in any way.



Another challenge is in demonstrating the value of such activity to faculty and departments who are less willing to devote time to it. Without having factual data to evidence success and the benefits of working with the press team, Karl and his colleagues sometimes struggle to make their case with more skeptical members of the staff.

Altmetrics as a solution

In Spring 2015 Duke made the decision to adopt the Altmetric for Institutions platform. The communications team, Karl reports, are interested to use it to get a better understanding of the reach of Duke research amongst broader audiences.

Karl comments, “the donuts provide a great at-a-glance indicator of the type of attention a piece of research has received, and it’s really useful to be able to browse and compare a lot of articles at once.”

Monitoring this online attention will help Karl and his team measure the effects of their efforts – they’re also planning to compare a test group of articles against a control group that they do no additional promotion for to understand how it affects the amount of coverage and uptake.

“Identifying and digging into success stories will help us understand and learn best practice.”

Having insight into what works and what doesn’t will also give the team an opportunity to identify best practice amongst their faculty, which they can use to demonstrate the benefits amongst other researchers and departments.

This kind of overview will also be useful, Karl adds, for getting an understanding of new hires and their most high-profile work.

The real-time nature of altmetrics data means that the Duke Communications team will have a much better grasp of who is saying what about their research, and which communication channels seem to be most engaged with a particular topic.

“Demonstrating to faculty the tangible benefits of working with the Communications Office is going to be helpful to us.”

Being able to easily report back to faculty on the online attention and activity surrounding their work will be another key way of communicating the value in the work that Karl’s team does.

Top articles in policy documents

	Rank	Policy Documents	Score	Title
	1st	53	9	Aid, Pol
	2nd	48	17	Grading
	3rd	15	6	Does fir
	4th	7	7	Foreign
	5th	5	3	The Syr
	5th	5	6	Emergi
	5th	5	3	The Ret

Evidencing the value of their work and understanding what resonates with their audience to build a stronger outreach strategy are key priorities for the Duke Communications team – and they anticipate with the use of altmetrics data and the Altmetric for Institutions platform this will become much easier.