Amplifying Academic Voices in Media: Barriers & Opportunities

Preparing nursing students and faculty to engage publicly with clarity, confidence, and professional responsibility.

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Before we begin…

Raise your hand if you have ever:

- **Shared professional expertise outside your workplace or classroom**
- Been asked for your professional opinion publicly
- Wondered whether you were *allowed* to speak because of your institutional affiliation
- Decided not to say something because you weren't sure of the policy

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Nurses have expertise the public needs

But having expertise and feeling able to share it are not the same thing.

What we will explore

- **How institutional media and social media policies can influence willingness to engage publicly.**
- How media and social media policies influence willingness to engage publicly.
- What we learned about professional identity, institutional expectations, preparation, and barriers
- How nursing education leaders can clarify guidance, strengthen preparation, and support responsible professional voice.

Professional voice is part of nursing practice

When people hear “advocacy”

- Politics
- Lobbying
- Public speaking
- Conflict

What nurses already do

- Protect
- Educate
- Translate
- Improve

Public engagement is another setting where nurses can use the same professional skills responsibly and within scope.

What happens when speaking feels risky?

UNCLEAR EXPECTATIONS → **HESITATION** → **SILENCE**

**A safe culture does not remove accountability;
it makes accountability possible.**

Silence can be a rational response when people cannot predict the rules, process, or consequences.

Psychological safety is a learning outcome

A safe culture does not remove accountability; it makes accountability possible.

- **Questions are treated as clinical reasoning—not disrespect**
- Uncertainty can be voiced before it becomes harm
- Faculty model how to challenge ideas while respecting people
- Debriefing includes what made speaking up easier or harder
- Leaders respond consistently when concerns are raised

Academic leaders shape whether professional voice feels supported or risky

- **Policies that faculty and students can understand**
- Clear routes for consultation and escalation
- Consistent protection for good-faith professional expression
- Media and advocacy preparation before a public moment
- Partnerships that connect academic expertise with community needs

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What helps, or prevents, healthcare professionals in academic settings from sharing their expertise publicly?

And how can institutions support that engagement in ways that benefit the professional, the public, and the institution?

What we did

Goal: clearer pathways for responsible professional participation, not unrestricted expression.

1 REVIEW

Institutional media, social media, public-expression, and related guidance

2 LISTEN

Academic and professional stakeholders: experiences, concerns, and institutional perspectives

3 SYNTHESIZE

Recurring barriers, opportunities, and recommendations for responsible engagement

What we heard

CULTURE MATTERS

Written policy is only part of the experience. Institutional culture influences whether speaking feels supported.

ROLE CLARITY MATTERS

Questions persist around personal expression, professional expertise, and institutional representation.

PREPARATION MATTERS

Media engagement skills are not routinely taught before public opportunities arise.

SUPPORT MATTERS

Clear guidance and accessible consultation can make responsible engagement easier to navigate.

Media means more than an interview

Academic media engagement can serve both public education and institutional mission.

Why professional voice matters now

- **Public health debates increasingly unfold in public and online**
- Misinformation fills spaces where credible expertise is absent
- Faculty and students may face scrutiny for public engagement
- Institutional responses can either clarify or amplify risk
- Nursing’s visibility influences trust, policy, and who is seen as an expert

Professional identity and institutional identity

A nurse may speak as

- A licensed professional
- A scholar or educator
- A community member
- A policy advocate

An institution must clarify

- Who speaks officially
- When approval is required
- How affiliation is described
- Where support is available

When am I speaking as a nurse and when am I speaking for my institution ?

Unclear expectations can become a barrier to participation

Critical question: Can people understand the policy before they need it?

- **Faculty avoid interviews because approval routes are unclear**
- Students decline opportunities because consequences feel unpredictable
- Disclaimers become substitutes for meaningful guidance
- Time-sensitive public health conversations move on without nursing input
- Rules may be content-neutral yet unequally burdensome in practice

What shapes willingness to use professional voice?

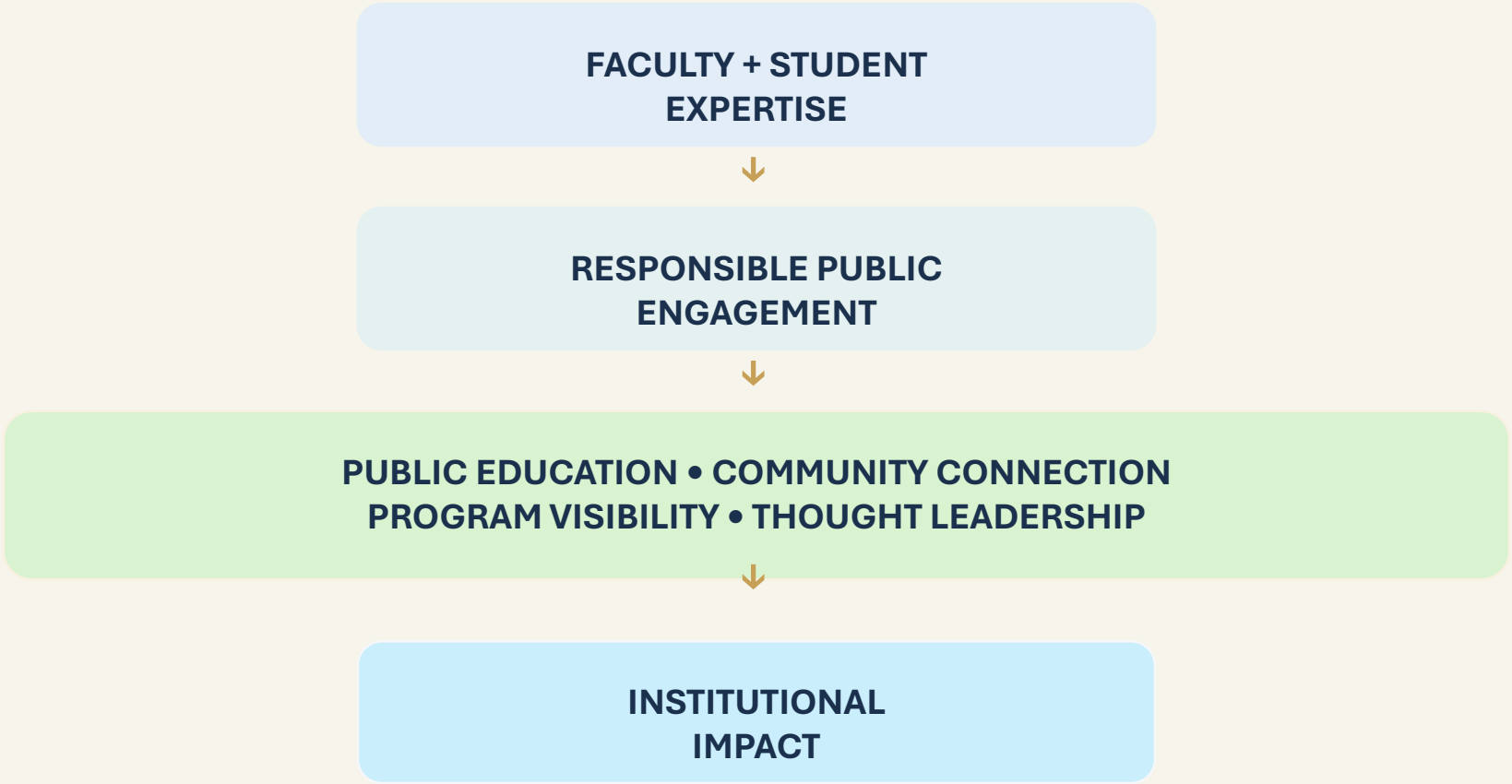
Creates Hesitation

- Ambiguous policies
- Unclear social media boundaries
- Fear of consequences
- Complicated approval processes
- Inconsistent Enforcement

Supports Participation

- Clear Expectations
- Media Preparation
- Accessible guidance
- Consistent leadership response
- Practice and mentorship

Visibility can create institutional value



The opportunity is shared

FOR FACULTY & STUDENTS

- Share expertise
- Build professional identity
- Develop communication skills
- Contribute to public understanding
- Participate in professional conversations

FOR INSTITUTIONS

- Highlight expertise
- Increase program visibility
- Support recruitment and engagement
- Strengthen community connection
- Advance institutional mission

Professional voice and institutional stewardship do not have to compete.

Balance responsibility without defaulting to silence

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- Protect students and patients
- Maintain public trust
- Manage legal and operational risk
- Clarify official representation

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- Advance health and safety
- Address inequity
- Correct misinformation
- Use expertise responsibly

A supportive media policy answers practical questions

Could a faculty member find and understand your process within ten minutes?

- **What requires institutional approval and what does not?**
- Who may identify their professional or academic affiliation?
- When and how should a disclaimer be used?
- What guidance applies to personal/professional social media accounts?
- Where can faculty or students get rapid guidance?
- What protections apply to responsible, good-faith participation?

From risk management to readiness

RISK MANAGEMENT

“What could go wrong if they speak?”

+

MEDIA READINESS

“What support helps them engage responsibly?”

Clear policy + Preparation + Consultation + Support

Media readiness can be taught

Practice before the stakes are high.

- **Curricular threads connecting ethics, advocacy, policy, and communication**
- Media literacy and public-writing practice
- Simulation of escalation, testimony, interviews, and difficult conversations
- Faculty development on institutional policies and public engagement
- Academic–practice–professional organization partnerships
- Responsible professional social media engagement

Four commitments for nursing education leaders

1	**Teach professional voice as practice**	Connect ethics, safety, quality, policy, and professional voice across the curriculum.
2	**Make policies usable**	Clarify when faculty and students may speak, who can help, and what protections apply.
3	**Practice public communication**	Use simulation, writing, media literacy, and testimony exercises before the stakes are high.
4	**Create supported pathways**	Pair learners and faculty with mentors, organizations, and real opportunities to participate.

What could this look like in practice?

BEFORE

Media training
Policy education
Practice

→

WHEN

Clear decision pathway
Rapid consultation
Communications support

→

DURING

Role clarity
Responsible affiliation
Professional standards

→

AFTER

Debrief
Feedback
Continued mentorship

Audience reflection

Discuss with someone near you for two minutes.

- **Where are students currently learning how to use their professional voice?**
- Could they explain your institution's media/social media expectations?
- Would a student know where to go before posting or speaking publicly as a healthcare professional?
- Does your current process make responsible participation or silence easier?

This month, choose one

Start with one change you can own.

- **Review one institutional media or social media policy for clarity and usability.**
- Identify one unclear approval or consultation pathway
- Add one media-readiness activity for students or faculty
- Invite communications or PR professionals into nursing education
- Create one supported opportunity for faculty or students to share expertise

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Academic institutions already have experts.

The opportunity is creating conditions that help them share that expertise responsibly.

Amplifying professional voice starts before the public moment

Professional voice should not begin with uncertainty about whether it is safe to speak.

When institutions provide clarity, preparation, and support, faculty and students are better positioned to contribute their expertise to public conversations.

We are not only amplifying individual voices, we are making nursing expertise more visible.

Questions + discussion

Where do you see the greatest barrier right now?

Policy clarity • Institutional culture • Preparation • Access to support

Where do you see the greatest opportunity to increase responsible faculty and student visibility?

Connect with me

References

Key sources used to support presentation content

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