LSC in the Lab: Science and Communication Intersections

Wednesdays, 10 am to 11 am
139 Hiram Smith Hall
Faculty Instructor: Dominique Brossard (dbrossard@wisc.edu). Office hours: by appointment.
Course coordinators: Ashley Anderson (aaanderson3@wisc.edu) and Jill Hopke (jehopke@wisc.edu)

Science and communication are often intertwined. It is vital to effectively communicate accurate scientific information to broad public audiences. However, processes of scientific production are also embedded within broader communication processes. The goal of this course is to bring together bench and social scientists to explore the connections between processes of scientific knowledge creation, applied communication theory, and public perceptions of science. In this course, students will:

- Actively engage in discussions during lab and outside speaker visits.
- Collaborate with other graduate students throughout the semester to create a final report on the state of intersections between scientists and communicators at UW.
- Come away from this class with a critical understanding of the necessity and practice of communicating science in the 21st century.

Exploring how science and communication interact

The goal for this part of the course is for communication scholars to get a better sense of the production of science and for scientists to get a better idea of the role of communication in the scientific process.

We will start at the micro-level by examining ways in which scientists communicate with each other via peer-to-peer communication that is both mediated and interpersonal. Extending from this inner sphere, the production of science is surrounded by processes of communication involving mass media, as well as new media. Public understanding of that science is a necessary precursor for effective public and government interactions with important public policy implications at local, national, and international levels. Alongside these processes are alternative means of communication, including scientist-public interactions in online communication spaces, as well as structured dialogic communication between scientists and citizens in deliberative settings, such as consensus conferences. Furthermore, citizen-driven interest groups and social movements on a range of health, environmental, and scientific issues involve scientists in their work and at times actively oppose dominate scientific claims in order to drum up support for their policy positions.

These conceptual perspectives will serve as the basis for more practical activities in the course.

Communicating to External Publics

As researchers, we all face challenges and opportunities in communicating our work to the general public. During this part of the course, we will explore the importance of communicating with the public, strategies for going about communication with the public, and how the public makes meaning of scientific communication. This section will explore how members of the public perceive and understand expertise, where they develop sources of trust, and how they develop scientific knowledge and form opinions on scientific issues.

The two parts of the course will be integrated.

Course Expectations

We will be regularly visiting science labs on campus. All graduate students are expected to actively participate in discussing with classmates, asking questions of speakers, and critically engaging with the material of the course. At the end of the course, the class will produce a final report on intersections between science and communication. As a group, we will decide on the content, the organization, and the format of the report, including how and where it will be disseminated. The report will be sent to all visiting speakers for the course.

The course coordinators will be emailing no later than Tuesday of each week with instructions about where we will meet the following day. It is imperative that students are on time to each class session, particularly for guest speaker and lab visits.

Missing more than two class sessions will impact a student's final grade. Attendance will be recorded through a sign-in sheet.

Students will be evaluated on their active participation in course activities and their contribution to the final report.

Accommodations

If you have a disability that may affect your performance in this course, please contact us early in the semester. Also, please contact the McBurney Center (www.mcburney.wisc.edu, 1305 Linden Dr.) to request accommodations.

Readings

Please check Learn@UW throughout the semester to find readings. We'll let you know as we post things.

Schedule*

Week 1, Sept. 8: Course overview and introduction to the ways in which science and communication intersect.

Week 2, Sept. 15: Paul Nealey, Chemical and Biological Engineering

Week 3, Sept. 22: Randall Jackson, Agronomy

Week 4, Sept. 29: Padma Gopalan, Materials Science and Engineering.

Week 5, Oct. 6: Jill Ouellette, Science writer

Week 6, Oct. 13: Peter Weingart, Institute for Science and Technology Studies (IWT), University of Bielefeld, Germany

Week 7, Oct. 20: Discussion week. Recap recent lab visits. Brainstorm for final project.

Week 8, Oct. 27: David Schwartz, Genetics

Week 9, Nov. 3: Paul Nealey, Chemical and Biological Engineering

Week 10, Nov. 10: Discussion week. Recap recent lab visits. Brainstorm for final project.

Week 11, Nov. 17: Media & Society Research Group, Life Sciences Communication Department

Week 12, Nov. 24: Thanksgiving week. No class.

Week 13, Dec. 1: Kurt Squire, Games, Learning & Society Research Group

Week 14, Dec. 8: Patty Loew, Life Sciences Communication

Week 15, Dec. 15: Discussion week. Recap recent lab visits. Final report due.

* This schedule is tentative. We will communicate over Learn@UW and e-mail regarding the schedule and location of our class meetings for each week.