

**SEMINAR SERIES: COMMUNICATING SCIENCE TO THE PUBLIC  
COURSE SYLLABUS**

**DATES AND TIME OFFERED**

Six three-hour sessions on 10/2, 10/9, 10/23, 11/6, 11/13, 11/20, 4 – 7 PM.

ROOM HSC RM 154

**COURSE CO-DIRECTORS**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The format of this course consists of six 3-hour lecture/workshop sessions, one session a week for six weeks for a total of 18 hours in class. This elective offers a series of seminars and workshops for health professionals who want to communicate more effectively about health science with patients, the public, public officials, the media, potential funders and employers, as well as colleagues in other disciplines. Improvisation will be threaded throughout the six sessions. Dr. Kaplan-Liss and an improvisation instructor will be teaching each of the six sessions along with guest contributors from the School of Medicine, the community, the School of Journalism and the Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science. This elective is interprofessional and will include medical, nursing and dental students.

Session topics include:

*Session 1: Improvisation for Scientists – 10/2*

This part of the course uses improvisational theater techniques to help learners be more direct and dynamically responsive communicators. This is not about acting; it's about helping current and future scientists and health professional connect with patients, the public or other audiences. Science graduate students who had several sessions of improvisation reported communicating better as teachers, students and family members as well as developing better studying skills.

*Session 2: Distilling Your Message 1 – 10/9*

Learners will be introduced to basic principles of clear communication as part of learning to speak clearly and vividly about science in ways a lay audience can understand and appreciate.

*Session 3: Distilling Your Message 2 – 10/23*

Learners will practice the distilling techniques discussed in *Distilling Your Message 1*. Learners will begin with crafting a short, clear, engaging statement about their work and why it matters. The focus will be put on helping learners communicate at different levels of complexity to different kinds of audiences. Preparation for *Taped Communicating Science - 11/6*.

*Session 4: Taped Communicating Science - 11/6*

The Clinical Skills Center will be utilized to tape on camera each learner practicing the skills they learned in improvisation and distilling to communicate their message to a patient, the public etc. The message

and audience will be dependent on the learner's discipline and year and will be discussed in the 10/23 class.

#### *Session 5: Connecting With the Community 1 – 11/13*

Learners will explore the importance of community in outreach and research. They will be introduced to communication techniques that incorporate cultural competency and health literacy concepts to engage and mobilize the community and key stakeholders on health-related issues. Role-playing with a community advocate will illustrate the take-home points essential to cultivating relationships with the community. Guests: Dr. Aldustus Jordan, Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Stony Brook Medicine; Karen Joy Miller, community advocate, Founding Director of the Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition.

#### *Session 5: Role Playing – 11/20*

In this culminating session, learners will use the skills they learned and practiced in improvisation, distilling your message and connecting with the community in role-playing scenarios, bringing to bear the new techniques they have learned and becoming aware of the progress they have made. Scenarios include: health professional/patient interaction; speaking with a legislator; culturally competent exercise, and public health communication. This session includes resources for learners to continue working on their communication skills.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

- \* Speak clearly and vividly about science in ways a lay audience can understand and appreciate.
- \* Connect with an audience, colleagues, patients, friends or any partners in communication in a spontaneous, direct, personal and responsive way.
- \* Use communication techniques that incorporate cultural competency and health literacy concepts to reach and mobilize the community and key stakeholders on health-related issues.

### **READING AND ASSIGNMENTS**

No textbook is used. For current examples of good science communication, some likely sources are *The New York Times* science section on Tuesdays; the NPR radio show *Science Friday*, with a website at <http://sciencefriday.com/>, and the Scientific American site at [www.sciam.com](http://www.sciam.com). Interesting science blogs can be found at the PLoS Blog Network (<http://blogs.plos.org/blogosphere/>), ScienceBlogs (<http://scienceblogs.com/>), and <http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/>.

### **GRADING AND EVALUATION**

Pass/Fail for medical students and Letter grades for nursing students. Passing grade depends on mandatory attendance for all sessions and satisfactory participation in seminar sessions and workshops. Instructors will evaluate each work product from each session (improvisation participation, distilled message, oral message, written statement, multi-media participation) and report to course director.