

Stony Brook University
School of Journalism
JRN 501 Communicating Science to the Public: Distilling Your Message
Fall 2013

Thursday, Aug. 29, and Sept. 5, 12, 19, and 26; 5:30-8:30 pm in Melville Library, The News Room, #W0335

Instructors:

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Office hours (or by appointment):

Liz Bass, Melville Melville N4016, Thursday, 3:30-5:30 pm

Christine O'Connell, Melville N4016, Tuesday, 3:30-5:30 pm

Graham Chedd, Melville N4015, Wednesday, 3:30-5:30 pm

I. Course Description

JRN 501, Distilling Your Message, aims to help graduate students in science and health disciplines learn to speak clearly and vividly about science in ways a lay audience can understand and appreciate. The course will focus on helping you communicate differently to different kinds of audiences in different formats. We will meet in Melville W0335 for lectures and discussion and then split into two or three groups (in Melville W0335 or N4043) for hands-on practice. The fourth class, Sept. 19th, will be held in the TV studios in the ECC (Educational Communications Center), located between Javits and the Psychology building. This course requires active participation by all students, not only as speakers and writers, but as listeners, editors and constructive critics.

II. Reading and Assignments

Required reading and assignments will be posted on Blackboard or distributed as handouts. No textbook is used. Additional optional readings and other resources will be posted on Blackboard.

Hearing, reading and watching examples of good science communication can be helpful. Some likely sources: Story Collider's podcast (<http://storycollider.org/>), The New York Times Tuesday science section; NPR radio shows RadioLab (<http://www.radiolab.org/>) and Science Friday (<http://sciencefriday.com/>); and blogs such as Carl Zimmer's The Loom and Ed Yong's Not Exactly Rocket Science (both at <http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/>) and Scientific American's 60-second podcasts, such as "60 Second Mind" (click multimedia on www.sciam.com).

III. Grades

If you come to class, do the assignments on time, and make an effort, you are highly likely to get an A.

IV. Attendance

Because this is a five-session course and emphasizes work done in class, rather than homework, it is particularly important that you come to class. If you miss two or more classes, you should withdraw from the course to avoid getting an F. Other situations will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. If circumstances prevent your attending class, the instructor must be informed by phone or email on or before the day of class or within 24 hours afterward. Arrangements should be made with the instructor to make-up the missed material.

V. Miscellaneous

E-mail: All university email communications use your primary campus address (firstname.lastname@stonybrook.edu). If you are not using that address, you will not receive any university email, including Blackboard.

Blackboard: There is a Blackboard account for this course. Check daily for announcements. Failure to check e-mail will not be accepted as an excuse for missing announcements or assignment changes. If you have not done so already, you must set up a Blackboard account. Please verify your email address on Blackboard. For help, call 631-632-9602.

Academic Integrity: *Any form of fabrication, plagiarism, cheating or other ethical offense will be reported to the Academic Judiciary Committee and can result in a failing grade for the course, dismissal from the journalism program or expulsion from the university.*

Here is the University's statement on academic dishonesty:

"Plagiarism is the use of others' words and/or ideas without clearly acknowledging their source. As students, you are learning about other people's ideas in your course texts, your instructors' lectures, in-class discussions, and when doing your own research. When you incorporate those words and ideas into your own work, it is of the utmost importance that you give credit where it is due. Plagiarism, intentional or unintentional, is considered academic dishonesty and all instances will be reported to the Academic Judiciary. To avoid plagiarism, you must give the original author credit whenever you use another person's ideas, opinions, drawings, or theories as well as any facts or any other pieces of information that are not common knowledge. Additionally quotations of another person's actual spoken or written words; or a close paraphrasing of another person's spoken or written words must also be referenced. Accurately citing all sources and putting direct quotations – of even a few key words – in quotation marks are required."

For further information on academic integrity and the policies regarding academic dishonesty, go to Academic Judiciary at www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary

Americans with Disabilities Act: If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, Room 128, [\(631\) 632-6748](tel:631-632-6748). They will determine with you what accommodations, if any, are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

<https://web.stonybrook.edu/newfaculty/StudentResources/Pages/DisabilitySupportServices.aspx>.

Disruptive Behavior: “Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty members are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn.”

JRN: 501 Distilling Your Message

Class Schedule

Pre-class assignment: Read posted material about clear communication. Be prepared to tell a stranger, in one minute, about your scientific work and why it matters. (Full assignment is posted on Blackboard.)

Class 1, Aug. 29: Distilling Overview

Lecture: Distilling Your Message

- Introductions and overview of course
- Basics of clearly communicating about science without dumbing it down

Break – 10 min

Break Out Groups:

- Practice making a short, clear, conversational statement about your scientific work (or a scientific issue you've studied) that will interest and engage a non-scientist.
- Discuss assignment for next class

Assignment: Read, watch postings on storytelling. Come prepared to tell us a story about a turning point in your life or your work. It should take 3 minutes or less.

If you have one, please email us an abstract of something you've worked on; send it by Sept. 3.

Class 2, Sept. 5: Connecting and Storytelling

Lecture: Telling a Story

- Short video – what do you see?
- Elements of storytelling
- Group activity - how to tell a story

Break – 10 min

Break Out Groups

- Practice telling stories
- Discuss assignment for next class

Assignment for next class: Prepare a 2-minute talk for 1) a high school career day, and 2) for your choice from our list of audiences. (Full assignment will be posted on Blackboard.)

Class 3, Sept. 12: Knowing Your Audience

Lecture: Knowing Your Audience

- Science-speak and jargon in science – video examples

- Know your audience and know your purpose
 - Different types of audiences
 - Different goals/messages - education, funding, job, etc.
- Group activity: 2 volunteers give their talks

Break – 10 min

Break Out Groups:

- Each student gives his/her prepared talk

Reconvene as Larger Group:

- How to be interviewed, especially on TV
- Prepare for next week's interviews

Assignment for next class: By noon Tuesday, Sept. 17, please post a paragraph to help the interviewer know more about you. We don't want a CV or resume. Imagine you are going to appear on a local TV station's morning show, in a weekly segment called "Talking about Science." The producers want your bio, so they can prepare questions. Include basic info about yourself (I'm John Doe, a PhD student in chemistry), a sentence about your research or area of interest, and a description of what you want to discuss in the interview. Think about a television audience. If there is some striking fact or highlight that makes you or your work particularly interesting, be sure to include it.

Class 4, Sept. 19: Interviews

This session will be held in the TV studios in the ECC (Educational Communications Center), located between Javits and the Psychology building.

- Students will be interviewed on camera, with feedback and playback. You'll be able to download your interview later.

Assignment for next class: Find a science story that you think distills its message well for the general public and write a brief explanation of what you think is good about it. Post the article and your comments on Blackboard by Tuesday, Sept. 24.

Class 5, Sept. 26: Distilling Your Writing

Lecture: Science Outreach and Opportunities

- Types of outreach
- Science writing and how its covered in different forums
- Group activity on being concise
- Review summaries: read and critique

Break – 10 min.

Discussion:

- Moving forward (with communicating science)
- Opportunities for outreach
- Evaluations