

Course Syllabus

2022-23 session | Dr Melanie Smallman | m.smallman@ucl.ac.uk

Course description

In this module, we look more at the ‘politics’ of science communication and the role we might play as science communicators in contributing to particular ‘worlds’ or social arrangements. While some see the role of science communication as promoting science or attracting young people into the field, others see its purpose as involving non-scientists in accessing and even shaping the direction that science takes. All of these approaches have one thing in common however – the act of science communication is producing knowledge and social worlds at the same time. Taking this ‘coproductionist’ approach to understanding science communication, this module will look at a series of real world case studies from science communication practice – and develop a proposal of our own - to understand and reflect on the role of science communication in creating identities, knowledge and particular ways of being in the world, as well as to consider the factors that go into communicating science effectively for social change and social justice.

Basic course information

Moodle Web site:	HPSC0153
Assessment:	2500 word coursework
Timetable:	See UCL timetable for seminar times
Prerequisites:	No pre-requisites
Required texts:	No required texts. Each week there are two or three essential readings
Course tutor(s):	Melanie Smallman
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Office hours:	

Schedule

UCL	Topic	Date	Activity
20	Week 1: Introduction Why is social justice an issue for science communication? <i>Dr Melanie Smallman</i>	12 January 2023	Read this week's readings
21	Week 2: The Challenge <i>Introduction to the assessment 'challenge' that will run throughout the module and initial brainstorm of possible topics and approaches (all)</i>	19 January 2023	Be prepared to brainstorm and discuss possible topics and approaches to your project proposal (assessment).
22	Week 3: Social Justice and structural power <i>Dr Simon Lock</i>	26 January 2023	Read this week's readings
23	Week 4: Constructing audience and ideas of hard to reach or underserved publics. <i>Dr Stephen Hughes</i>	2 February 2023	Read this week's readings
24	Week 5: Communicating for action: Climate Change <i>Prof Charlotte Sleight (online)</i>	9 February 2023	Read this week's readings
25	Reading Week	16 February 2023	No class
26	Week 6: Challenge update Checking in on your project proposal and drawing up criteria for success in a seminar style session. <i>(All)</i>	23 February 2023	Be ready to talk about your current ideas/outline for your project proposal (assessment)
27	Week 7: Communicating for change Guest Speaker 1	2 March 2023	

28	Week 8: Pitching your projects (All + Guests)	9 March 2023	Prepare and present your project (assessment) outline for feedback and advice
29	Week 9: Communicating for Change guest speaker 2	23 March 2023	
30	Week 10: Reflections on Science Communication for Social Justice and final touches to assessment.	24 March 2023	Assessments due.

Aims

The aims of the module are to prompt students to understand the power of science communication to bring about social change, as well as to reflect on the political dimension of science communication as a means of conveying social values and beliefs and as a tool for social inclusion or exclusion. Students will be introduced to theories and concepts It is to introduce students to theories and concepts related to social justice and intersectionality in relation to science communication.

While the first part of the module will be focused on theories, it will also be centered around our practical communication 'challenge', which will culminate in the final assessment but will also be worked and reflected upon throughout the module.

Objectives

By the end of this module, students should:

- Be familiar with key ideas relating to social justice
- Understand how 'publics' and audiences are constructed and how that affects decisions about science communication and vice versa
- Understand how science communication is used for social change in practice
- Be able to develop a plan to enact and evaluate change through science communication
- Have a project proposal to include in their portfolio

Week 1: Introduction- why is social justice an issue for science communication?

(Dr Melanie Smallman)

This week's session will provide an introduction to and overview of the module as a whole. We will look at what we mean by social justice and how it relates to our activities as science communicators. In particular, we will reflect more on the idea of science communication as a place where knowledge and social worlds are coproduced, consider how these worlds (and technologies) might look different to different groups of people and how science and technology might be reinforcing or even driving social inequality in some instances, as well as posing questions about what purpose science communication serves in this context.

Essential Readings

Lawrence R. Frey, W. Barnett Pearce, Mark A. Pollock, Lee Artz & Bren A.O. Murphy (1996) Looking for justice in all the wrong places: On a communication approach to social justice, *Communication Studies*, 47:1-2, 110-127, DOI: 10.1080/10510979609368467

Smallman (2019) Language, Power and Public Engagement. In *Routledge Handbook of Language and Science* Eds David R. Gruber, Lynda C. Olman.

Open access version here

https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10138031/1/Smallman_language%20and%20power%20in%20dialogue%20mils%20submitted.pdf

Dawson, E., Hughes, S. Lock, S. J. and Wahome, M. (2022). 'Exploring the politics of science communication research: looking at science communication from a social justice perspective'. *JCOM* 21 (07), C05. <https://doi.org/10.22323/2.21070305>.

Week 2: The Challenge

This week will introduce you to the assessment 'challenge' that will run throughout the module. The session will also include an initial brainstorm of possible topics and approaches that you might want to consider taking in the assessment.

Week 3: Social justice and structural power

(Dr Simon Lock)

In this week's session we will consider some of the ways in which the spaces in which public engagement happens, often 'public' spaces, are structured around broader social cultural and political forms of power which can constrain who gets to speak, on what and in which ways. Drawing on ideas from social justice literature and black, feminist and queer theories we will consider how to both critique prevailing Western ideas of a neutral public sphere but also think about ways in which we might counteract or resist such forces rather than reproducing them in our public engagement practices.

Essential Readings

Dawson, E., Hughes, S., Lock, S. J., & Wahome, M. (2022). Exploring the politics of science communication research: looking at science communication from a social justice perspective. *Journal of Science Communication*, 21(7), C05.

Ballo, R., Das, S., Dawson, E., Mignan, V., & Perronnet, C. (2021). Feminism, intersectionality, and decolonization theories: "The price we have to be willing to pay is ourselves": Discussing illusions of inclusion in science centers and museums. In *Theorizing Equity in the Museum* (pp. 34-49). Routledge.

Fraser, N. (1992). *Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy*, Habermas and the Public Sphere. J. Calhoun. Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press

Week 4: Constructing audience and ideas of hard to reach or underserved publics.

(Dr Stephen Hughes)

This week explores the work of Centric Labs, a diverse team of scientists based in London who use neuroscience and geospatial data to study how the places we inhabit influence our health. Their main goal is to achieve environmental and health justice at local, national, and global levels. They produce research, insights, and tools that they share with academics, practitioners, and communities. We will focus on Centric's collaboration with the Southall community in west London, who, in 2017, started reporting an increasing number of health problems that coincided with the construction of a large development on an old gasworks site. We will consider these ideas through the lens of abolitionist feminism, a radical form of political critique.

Reading:

Marina Bell 2022. 'Abolition as a Project of Personal Transformation'. *Penal Field*.
27. <https://doi.org/10.4000/champpenal.13491>.

Week 5: Communicating for Action

(Prof Charlotte Sleigh)

Activism is a form of science communication, highlighting and leveraging scientific findings to attempt social and/or political change. Its most important instances cluster around issues of climate breakdown and mass extinction: Greenpeace, Greta Thunberg, Extinction Rebellion and Fridays For Future are well known examples. In this seminar, we examine two lesser-known case-studies from Uganda and Brazil. We ask what other issues of justice are entangled with the scientific matters of ecological catastrophe, and examine the extent to which intersectional identity both gives and impedes authority and efficacy in activist science communication. Ambitious students may begin to see how activist science communication actually reframes the platform for, and nature of, science itself.

Essential Readings

- Guajajara, Sônia and Célia Xakriabá, "Indigenous Women on the Frontlines of Climate Activism: The Battle for Environmental Justice in the Amazon" (2021). Faculty

Publications, Smith College, Northampton, MA.
https://scholarworks.smith.edu/spp_facpubs/10

- Barnes, Brendon R. "Reimagining African Women Youth Climate Activism: The Case of Vanessa Nakate." *Sustainability* 13.23 (2021): 13214 <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132313214>

Advanced Readings

- Nakate, Vanessa, *A Bigger Picture: My Fight to Bring a New African Voice to the Climate Crisis* (Mariner, 2021) ISBN 978-0358654506
- Dryzek, John S., Richard B. Norgaard, and David Schlosberg, eds. *The Oxford handbook of climate change and society*. Oxford University Press, 2011. Chapters in parts III, VI and VII
- Sempértegui, Andrea. "Indigenous women's activism, ecofeminism, and extractivism: partial connections in the Ecuadorian Amazon." *Politics & Gender* 17.1 (2021): 197-224.
- Feldman, Hannah R. "A rhetorical perspective on youth environmental activism." *Journal of Science Communication* 19.6 (2020): C07.
- Nkrumah, Bright. "Eco-activism: youth and climate justice in South Africa." *Environmental Claims Journal* 33.4 (2021): 328-350.

Week 6: Challenge update

This week will be a seminar style session where we will draw up the criteria for measuring effective change. You will also have the opportunity to discuss your project proposal ideas to date with the module tutors.

Preparation: *Be ready to talk through your proposal to date in a small group.*

Week 7: Communicating for change Guest Speaker 1

Guest speaker with experience of delivering social change through science communication.
Look out for speaker details and readings on Moodle

Week 8: Pitch presentations

In this session, you will present your proposals for a piece of science communication that addresses social justice and brings about social change, to gain feedback from colleagues and tutors, to assist with your final assessment.

(Note – due to timetable limitations, you will be split into small groups for this session. Please check Moodle for more details).

Week 9: Communicating for change Guest Speaker 2

Guest speaker with experience of delivering social change through science communication.
Look out for speaker details and readings on Moodle

Week 10: Science communication for social change

This session will review the key ideas and messages from throughout the module and reflect upon the practical lessons learned from the theories and practices experienced in the module. The session will also pick up on any ideas or threads that have emerged throughout the module, leaving space for us to develop our own perspective on science communication for social justice and provide an opportunity for one to one support on the final assessment.

Assessment

Coursework (100%)	Project proposal	2500 words	5pm Monday 27 th March 2023
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For this assessment, you will be required to write a 2500 pitch proposal for a science communication campaign that aims to achieve social change. Suggested projects are:

1. Bringing new audiences into a science museum
2. Motivating citizens to act on climate change
3. Developing appropriate technologies for a low-income country
4. Improving vaccine uptake amongst hesitant groups

You may also want to choose your own project, but please discuss this with the module tutor first.

In producing your document, your aim is to convince the 'clients' that your campaign will help them achieve their goal. As such, you will need to give a strong sense of:

1. Your vision and rationale for the campaign
 - What the campaign will comprise
 - Who your target audience is
 - The research and rationale that underpins your proposal (ie why you chose this audience and approach)
 - The impact you expect to achieve
2. Your strategy for achieving this
 - What are your key messages?
 - What channels will you use to reach your audience and why?
 - How will the channels contribute towards your overall aims?

3. Project plan
 - Timeline
 - Budget
4. Monitoring and evaluation plan
 - What problems or negative responses might this campaign raise? How will you know? What action will you take?
 - What will you do if there are unexpected outcomes of your campaign?
 - How will you measure the success of your campaign and why is this the best approach to evaluation?
5. Next steps
 - What is the follow on or legacy from this campaign?
 - What would you do if more resources became available during the campaign?

We are not asking you to produce the content for the campaign at this proposal stage, but anything you can submit that will help communicate the sense of how the campaign will work, look and feel will be rewarded. However, you need to remember that this is just a proposal, so, as in the real world, you need to be conscious of the consequences of over-pitching (ie putting too much time and effort into an unpaid proposal) and be mindful that communications campaigns always have a fixed timeline and budget.

Criteria for assessment

The departmental marking guidelines for individual items of assessment can be found in the STS Student Handbook.

Above these criteria, all the assessments will also be marked for:

Creativity

Do you present a proposal that will engage your audience and bring about social change in ways that are new, will stand out in a crowded information world, yet which is achievable within the parameters of the project?

Evidence

Are your proposals based on credible research and evidence that back up each decision you have made? In particular, does the proposal draw on the ideas and theories discussed in this module and programme to date?

Impact

Does your proposal come together coherently, in a way that is likely to achieve the impact you claim? And are your methods of monitoring and evaluating the campaign appropriate and likely to be effective?

Communication

Is the proposal written and presented clearly, accessibly and convincingly? Does it bring your ideas to life in a way that answers the brief set you?

Course expectations

In addition to submitting assessed material, students are expected to attend and participate in all classes. They are expected to have read the essential (and ideally recommended) reading before each class and be willing to discuss the literature and the lecture. Students are expected to conduct online research into areas of new technology. Students are also expected to share their work in progress, such that they can be read and commented upon by other members of the class. Those assessments reaching the required standard will have the opportunity to be included in the collective report, which will be shared more widely, outside UCL.

Important policy information

Details of college and departmental policies relating to modules and assessments can be found in the STS Student Handbook www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/handbook

All students taking modules in the STS department are expected to read these policies.
