ASCI 3100 SCIENCE COMMUNICATION  2021W

INSTRUCTOR: D. BRUCE

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Science and technology are embedded in virtually every aspect of modern life” (Communicating Science Effectively, 1). As discovery and invention have steadily increased, so has the need to expand science communication in order to reach a wide and very diverse audience. Most people do not specifically learn about science after their high school years, unless it is part of their job: technology and the science that underlies it remain mysterious to many people. Be it a cell phone, a refrigerator, or the role of bacteria deep in the recesses of our bodies, these are essentially ‘black boxes’.

Informed decisions by citizens about public policy as well as individual decisions about personal lifestyle often require more than just superficial knowledge of science and technology. The phenomenon of social / information ‘fragmentation’ appears to affect communication and understanding between the scientific community and the general public: this is in respect to both scientific knowledge (facts) and scientific understanding (method). Citizens are increasingly called upon to make public and personal decisions about important scientific issues relating to bioethics, energy, climate change, space exploration, green technologies, genetically modified organisms, access to information, end-of-life decisions, the value of fundamental research vs. applied research, to name but a few—and all this without expert training.

Given the nature of the BAS program, science communication is clearly an area of importance: knowledge of the techniques of written and visual rhetoric, and the historical and cultural dimensions of human activity are fundamental to the communication and analysis of scientific and technical knowledge. This course has two main components: 1) the discussion and analysis of the conceptual issues around science communication, and 2) the development of students’ skills in presenting science to a non-specialist audience in written, oral and visual forms. We will also address questions of inclusivity and diversity through the study of specific examples.

NOTE: There is a lot of writing in this (communications) course so students should be prepared for that commitment of time.