

EAS 677: Make it in the Media - Strategic Communications & Design for Impact

Room:

1507 North University Building (NUB)

Office Hours:

Tuesdays from 1-2 p.m. in 2046D (Back corner of Dean's suite)

Virtual also available by appointment. Additional office hour slots available by request

Please email to give heads-up that you plan to attend office hours and/or sign-up on shared calendar

- Send invite to Dave or Carole's office hour calendars, in 15-30 minute increments.

Course Description

Employers in the sustainability field are increasingly seeking individuals who not only understand the science and solutions needed to solve the world's most pressing environmental challenges but also who have the communications and storytelling skills to make science and sustainability more accessible to the public.

To address this critical and growing need, we've designed a skills-based course to help students develop the expertise needed to communicate science effectively in real-world scenarios across a number of channels. Through this course, students will learn: media pitching and live interviewing skills; how to leverage social media channels; graphic design; web; and photography/videography skills to present information in a visually compelling way. We will also discuss how to establish a personal brand and how to position yourself as a thought leader in your field.

Students will learn how to craft compelling and informative stories, infographics, community outreach materials, op-eds, and press releases to bridge the gap between science, sustainability, and the general public.

Whether you want to be in academia, business, nonprofit work, or community engagement, strong communications skills are critical to making a lasting impact.

There are no prerequisites for this course, and it is open to graduate students in all SEAS specializations.

About the Instructors

Carole Love is the Executive Director of Communications, Marketing, and Outreach at the School for Environment and Sustainability. She previously served as then-Governor (now Secretary of Energy) Jennifer Granholm's Director of Communications and Social Media, where

she helped establish Granholm as a leading authority on clean energy. She led strategic communications and crisis management in several high-level roles at the University of California, Berkeley. She previously worked as a producer for international, national, and local news organizations, including Current TV/Al Jazeera America and the Michigan Talk Network on Michigan Public Radio. She's developed award-winning strategic communications and viral social media campaigns. Carole has media/messaging trained everyone from lawmakers and corporate executives to athletes, scientists, nonprofit leaders, academics, and everyone in between.

Dave Brenner is the Web and Creative Director at the University of Michigan School for Sustainability and Environment. Brenner previously served as a lecturer at University of Alaska's Department of Journalism. He is an award-winning artist with over 30 years of experience in his field. His photography and work with informational graphic design have been published in numerous publications and magazines including Popular Science, USA Today, the Nature Conservancy, and the Detroit Free Press. His work in fine art is part of the University of Alaska Museum of the North and private collections.

Course Objectives

- To provide an introduction to real-world science and sustainability communications strategies and tactics, and equip students with skills for effectively communicating complex material
- To build students' practical communications skills, including media pitching and interviewing, storytelling, writing op-eds, and developing design assets to create effective outreach materials
- To provide students with an opportunity to hone their interviewing techniques for media interviews
- To provide students with basic technical and photography/video editing and graphic design skills to create short-form, approachable content
- To provide students with an opportunity to distill their personal brand and social media presence
- To develop basic web/social media skills to help present complex concepts to the broader public in the digital landscape
- To offer students an opportunity to apply their skills towards the development of real-world, practical communications deliverables
- To develop a firm grounding in ethical, diversity, equity, and inclusion considerations

Course format

- Lecture, discussion, assigned readings (peer-reviewed articles, book chapters), practical projects, assessed writing assignments, assessed oral assignment and final project (i.e. media training interview), class participation, active learning exercises (e.g. field photography session), and small group conversations.

Lecture capture

- Lecture capture is enabled in the classroom and recordings are available upon request.

Textbook(s)

- *Communicating Science Effectively: A Research Agenda*. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2017. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23674>
Download and read free online [here](#)
(Select chapters/readings can be found below. Each student must sign up to complete at least one chapter reading, which we will discuss in class.)
- Optional material - *Digital Photography Complete Course: Learn Everything You Need to Know in 20 Weeks* (DK Complete Courses)

Assessment

- Class participation
- Completion of assigned readings for class discussion
- Canvas discussion board participation (at least 3 discussions)
- Oral presentation - mock media interview
- Participation in active learning exercises (e.g. outdoor field photography session)
- Assessed writing assignments (press release, media pitch, personal brand statement, etc.)
- Assessed design/photography/videography assignments
- Assessed social media assignment
- Final project (20% of final grade) - assembling a media outreach strategy, documents, and kit which will include deliverables outlined below

Late (unexcused) assignments will be penalized at 10 percentage-points per day. Please notify us as soon as possible of any excused absences.

Grade grievances

You must submit requests for a re-grade within one week of receiving the original grade. You must attach the original graded item and provide a clear written explanation of what you would like to be re-evaluated and why. Your adjusted grade may be higher or lower than the original.

Course website

<https://umich.instructure.com/courses/638918>

Course Communication

Course materials will be posted on the Canvas website. Announcements are sent to your e-mail accounts from the Canvas site, or via Gmail. If you email us, we will do our best to get back to you within 48 hours. We will be slower to respond over the weekend. Please note EAS 677 in your subject line. The best emails are short and to the point, for longer more involved questions or comments please come to office hours or arrange a time to meet.

Engagement

Attend and engage! Your attendance and participation are encouraged, expected, appreciated, and part of your grade. Participation includes being well-prepared for class and making valuable (i.e., learned, inquisitive, contestation etc.) contributions to discussions and debates on a regular basis. Participation is assessed twice over the course of the semester, with a mid-semester self-assessment, so you have an understanding of where you stand. In addition to an overarching participation grade, there will be one point per class for attendance (13 attendance points total for the whole course).

Final project

We will be using a “scaffolding” approach to building your final project. You will work on the assignments throughout the semester and receive feedback on them throughout the course. For your final project, you will incorporate the feedback to polish final deliverables for submission.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) Classroom Policy:

Throughout the course, there will be assignments that specifically prompt you to use GenAI (for example, we will use GenAI to create a press release, in addition to assignments where students are expected to write an original press release without the use of GenAI). GenAI should **ONLY** be used in the cases that it is specifically identified as part of the assignment, and should not be used to develop assignments outside of where it is indicated that it is allowed. Students must clearly distinguish between their original work and GenAI output (e.g. tracking changes in GenAI Output). Any use outside of these parameters constitutes academic misconduct. SEAS follows [Rackham's misconduct policy](#).

Academic Integrity:

Our academic community, like all communities, functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. We hold all members of our community to high standards of scholarship and integrity. To accomplish its mission of providing an optimal educational environment and developing leaders of society, we promote the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty, plagiarism, and misconduct. Academic dishonesty may be understood as any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community. Plagiarism involves representing the words, ideas, or work of others as one's own in writing or presentations and failing to give full and proper credit to the original source. Conduct, without regard to motive, that violates the academic integrity and ethical standards will result in serious consequences and disciplinary action. Additional information regarding academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct and their consequences is available at:

<https://rackham.umich.edu/academic-policies/section8/#112>

OTHER INFORMATION

Inclusivity: Members of the SEAS and the broader UM community represent a rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives. We are committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. While working together to build community we ask all members to:

- share their unique experiences, values, and beliefs
- be open to the views of others
- honor the uniqueness of their colleagues
- appreciate the opportunity that we must learn from each other in this community
- value one another's opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
- keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal (or professional) nature
- use this opportunity together to discuss ways in which we can create an inclusive environment in SEAS classes and across the UM community

Mental Health and Wellbeing Resources: The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. We acknowledge that a variety of issues, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, and depression, directly impact students' academic performance. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or need support, services are available. For help, contact [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS) and/or [University Health Service](#) (UHS). For a listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit <http://umich.edu/~mhealth/>.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you believe you need accommodation for a disability, please reach out to U-M [Services for Students with Disabilities \(SSD\)](#) office to help determine appropriate academic accommodations and how to communicate about your accommodations with your professors. Any information you provide will be treated as private and confidential.

Public Health Protection Policy: In order to participate in any in-person aspects of this course--including meeting with other students to study or work on a team project--you must follow all the public health safety measures and policies put in place by the State of Michigan, Washtenaw County, the University of Michigan, and SEAS. Up to date information on U-M policies can be found [here](#). It is expected that you will protect and enhance the health of everyone in the community by staying home and following self-isolation guidelines if you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19

Use of Technology: Students should follow instructions from their instructor as to acceptable use of technology in the classroom, including laptops, in each course. All course materials (including slides, assignments, handouts, pre-recorded lectures, or recordings of class) are to be considered confidential material and are not to be shared in full or part with anyone outside of the course participants. Likewise, your own personal recording (audio or video) of your classes or office hour sessions is allowed only with the express written permission of your instructor. If you wish to post course materials or photographs/videos of classmates or your instructor to third-party sites (e.g., social media), you must first have informed consent. **Without**

explicit permission from the instructor and in some cases your classmates, the public distribution or posting of any photos, audio/video recordings or pre-recordings from class, discussion section or office hours, even if you have permission to record, is not allowed and could be considered academic misconduct.

Course Schedule

Aug. 31

Introduction

Agenda:

- Introductions
- Overview of topics
- Setting ground rules for participation
- Course goals
- Introduction of the final project
- Principles of Newsworthiness
- How to Choose the Best Photos for Your Science Articles

Reading:

Two readings for all:

- [Proven Principles of Effective Climate Change Communication. American Academy of Arts and Sciences Communications Working Group Whitepaper](#)
 - Here's the brief. it's contained in the white paper above but is more condensed for future reference: [Proven Principles of Effective Climate Change Communication. American Academy of Arts and Sciences Commission of Accelerating Climate Action.](#) **(Due Sept. 14th)**
- [28 Composition Techniques That Will Improve Your Photos](#)

Assignment:

- Canvas discussion board participation on Proven Principles of Effective Climate Change Communication reading **(participation due Sept. 21)**
- Canvas discussion board - 2 truths and a lie **(Due Sept. 7)**
- Determine topic for final project **(Due Sept. 14th)**
- Sign up for your chapter of *Communicating Science Effectively*
 - Max of 3-5 people per chapter, first come, first served. Sign up by **Sept. 21**. Sign-up sheet will be available in Canvas.

Sep. 7

Agenda:

- Photography/video basics: composition lecture
- Point-of-view composition exercise

Assignment:

- Photo composition assignment (**Due Sept. 21st** - will discuss in class)
- Reminder: Canvas discussion board participation on Proven Principles of Effective Climate Change Communication reading (**participation due Sept. 21**)

Reading:

Complete one of the two below. Groups will be assigned in Canvas:

- Group 1: [Using Political Efficacy Messages to Increase Climate Activism: The Mediating Role of Emotions](#)
 - Group 2: [How Climate Change News Imagery and Text Influence Audience Emotions and Support for Climate Mitigation Policies](#)
- Reading due by Sept. 21st for discussion

Sept. 14

Agenda:

- Photo Presentations and Discussions
- Documentary photography discussion
 - Ethics and Photography
- Field photography
- How to set up professional-style video-call interviews

Assignment:

- Field photography (5 shots) - **Due Sept. 28th**

Sept. 21

Agenda:

- Discussion on articles:
 - Group 1: [Using Political Efficacy Messages to Increase Climate Activism: The Mediating Role of Emotions](#) and Group 2: [How Climate Change News Imagery and Text Influence Audience Emotions and Support for Climate Mitigation Policies](#).
- Photo composition assignment due
- Final Project Topic Discussion/Share Out
- How to create an engaging infographic
- Basics of Canva and Adobe Illustrator

Assignment:

- Infographic assignment - **Due Oct. 5th**

Reading:

Required by all:

- [Harvard Business Review: A New Approach to Building Your Personal Brand](#)
- [Science: Building Your Personal Brand](#)

Sept. 28

Agenda:

- Field photography assignment due, discussion on field photography and Infographic assignment
- Introduction to personal branding
- Setting up a personal web and social media presence
- LinkedIn and Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Assignment:

- Personal brand statement for LinkedIn (LinkedIn Summary) - **Due Oct. 12th**

Reading:

If signed up for group 1, this is required:

- *Communicating Science Effectively*
Chapter 1: Using Science to Improve Science Communication

Oct. 5

Agenda:

- Infographic assignment due for Dave's review
- Discussion: *Communicating Science Effectively*, Chapter 1: Using Science to Improve Science Communication
- Social Media in Environmental Communications and Short Form Video (Instagram/TikToks)
 - Guest Speaker: Kelly Logan, SEAS Digital and Social Media Manager

Discussion:

- Social media assignment overview

Assignment:

- Social media content creation assignment - **Due Oct 19**
- Canvas discussion questions on personal brand

Reading:

If you signed up for group 2, this is required:

Communicating Science Effectively

- Chapter 2: The Complexities of Communicating Science

Oct. 12

Agenda:

- Personal brand statement for LinkedIn due
- Science writing for the public
 - Guest speaker: Jennifer Weeks, Senior Environment + Cities Editor, The Conversation U.S.
- Discussion: *Communicating Science Effectively*, Chapter 2: The Complexities of Communicating Science
- Discussion on social media and science writing assignment

Assignment:

- Non-technical summary - Science writing assignment - **Due Oct 26**

Oct. 19

Agenda:

- Guest Speaker: Liesl Clark, Director of Climate Action Engagement (previously served as Director of EGLE).
 - Topic: Effectively communicating environmental issues in the media. What resonates? Tips and tricks from the real world.
- Social media assignment due, discussion/presentations: Social media assignment
- Press releases
- Media pitches and advisories
- Social media use in press releases/media relations

Assignments (**Due Nov. 2**):

- Human-Generated Original Press Release
- AI Press release with mark-up
- GenAI Media Advisory with mark-up
- Reflection questions

Reading:

If you signed up for group 3, this is required:

- *Communicating Science Effectively*
 - Chapter 3: The Nature of Science-Related Public Controversies

Oct. 26

Agenda:

- Discussion: *Communicating Science Effectively*, Chapter 3: The Nature of Science-Related Public Controversies
- Non-technical science writing assignment due
- Media training
- The art of the block and bridge
- Winning the interview

Assignment:

- Talking points assignment and tough Q&A (at least 3 tough questions with answers)

Nov. 2

Agenda:

Assignments due:

- Human-Generated Original Press Release
- AI Press release with mark-up
- GenAI Media Advisory with mark-up
- Reflection questions on AI assignments
- Discussion: GenAI Press Releases
- Discussion: Talking points assignment
- Mock interviews using talking points
- Critiques and discussion

Reading:

Required by all:

- [Situating the Scientist: Creating Inclusive Science Communication Through Equity Framing and Environmental Justice](#)

Nov. 9

Agenda:

- Guest speaker: Cedric Taylor on interviewing ethics, profiling impacted communities

Nov. 16

Agenda:

- Potential guest speaker on environmental journalism experiences, ethics, and the future of news
- Developing a media kit
- Media advisory writing
- Op-ed writing
- Pitching to the media

Assignment:

- Media pitch - **Due Nov. 30**

Reading:

If you signed up for group 4, this is required:

Communicating Science Effectively

Chapter 4: Communicating Science in a Complex, Competitive Communication Environment

Nov. 23

No Classes - Break

Nov. 30

Agenda:

- Media pitch due
- Student presentations: media pitch
- Guest speaker: Jim Erikson, U-M Michigan News
- Q&A about final project or remaining questions
- Discussion: *Communicating Science Effectively*, Chapter 4: Communicating Science in a Complex, Competitive Communication Environment
- Course and final project recap

Assignments:

- Final Canvas discussion board questions - course recap
- Finalize your project materials

Dec. 7

Study Days

Dec. 8-15

Exams - Final Project Presentations

Final project and presentation :

- 1 - Non-technical summary of research/work/project (one page or less)
- 1 - Written Media Pitch
- 1-5 - Visual Elements (photo, infographic, video, etc.)
- 1 -Press release
- 1 - Set of talking points, including tough Q&A
- 1 - Social media component of your choice

Grading:

Category	Percentage of grade
Attendance	15%
Participation	10%
Canvas discussion board participation	6%
Photo composition assignment	3%
Field photography assignment	5%
Infographic assignment	5%
Personal brand LinkedIn statement	5%
Social media content creation assignment	5%
Non-technical summary	3%
Original press release	5%
AI release with mark-up	3%
Reflection Questions on AI Assignments	5%
Talking points assignment	5%
Media pitch	5%
Final project	20%
Total	100%