

## Julie Van Scoy

- Why work with the media?
  - Helps you communicate with the public, who are funding research
  - Publicity—raise your & your colleagues profile
  - Reporters return to sources who help them—can be useful connections later for disseminating your results, even if not a focus immediately
  - Helps reporters get their story about your research/field correct
    - Contributes to accurate science reporting benefits your field and science in general
- What is news?
  - Research: superlatives (“the first ever”), public-facing topics (cancer), timing (Zika virus means insect control is a hot topic right now)
    - Science news outlets will be findings-focused— but sometimes novel experiments can be newsworthy
  - Multi-million dollar awards/prizes
  - Examples
    - New microbes expanding our understanding of the tree of life—picked up in NYtimes
    - 25M nuclear science award – huge funding news
    - Wildfires are always in the news
  - Less newsworthy things
    - Overly technical breakthroughs
    - Stuff that’s already been covered lots recently
    - Courses
      - Some courses can be more newsworthy—ex: new course has famous people presenting
  - These are focused on when Berkeley would be interested in reporting news; other media outlets might have different takes or interests
    - Other channels: departmental or lab website, personal sites, feature stories
    - Fieldwork or small social media posts can kickstart press attention
- Scenarios
  - Story on your study findings
    - UC-Berkeley, CNR, Publishing Journal might do press releases—these then get picked up by the media
  - Expert commentary on topic in your research area
    - Consider: Do you know enough about this to actually make a comment?
    - If it’s a policy you don’t know enough about, avoid trying to make a comment
  - Hot seat / conflict issues
- Preparing for an interview
  - Get information:
    - About the reporter (name, media outlet, phone #, deadlines)
    - About the story (is the premise correct? are you the right person to comment?)
  - OK to tell reporters you’ll call back
    - Good way to collect your thoughts

- Prepare a key message—an overarching idea that can be expressed simply in one or two sentences
  - Important to prepare for the questions
    - What questions will you expect?
    - What don't you want to be asked?
  - Media is looking for short quotes and soundbytes
    - Think about a general audience—how would you explain this to someone in a bar?
  - “Message box” works great for this—Whendee Silver will cover later
  - Establish context & relevance—what is the societal/scientific problem your research addresses?
    - Use specific problem statements, power facts, connect to larger societal/cultural context
- Delivering your message
  - Avoid jargon, technical terms... don't do long explanations, avoid rambling. Say one thing.
    - Reporters will leave a pause once you stop talking intentionally; not to trick you, just to wait to see if you'll give more information. Resist the urge to fill it. Deliver your message and stop
  - News should be written to an eight-grade level
    - Microsoft Word can “grade” the reading level of your writing—can be useful.
    - “Flux of gases” – even this is complicated.
    - Use analogies—unscientific metaphors can be useful for scientific communication
- Print Journalists
  - Berkeley will probably run a copy of the article before published—others won't.
  - Beware throwaway/off the cuff comments. These can get published!
- Broadcast interviews
  - Stay positive, polite, enthusiastic
    - Lock eye contact with the interviewer, not the camera or the background
    - Sound authoritative & confident and talk in a conversational tone
      - Avoid “up-speak”
      - Don't be over-animated
      - Don't use the interviewer's name; too informal
  - Avoid ums, avoid jargon, deliver short soundbytes, don't ramble
  - Stay hydrated before-hand
  - Appearance matters
    - Comb hair, dress neatly (simple colors)
    - Wear makeup—foundation & blush—no matter your gender!
- Rephrasing the Question
  - Allows easier integration into text, editing of audio
  - Helpful for the broadcasters audio editing
  - Helps you refocus their question if it's over-broad... If you're just going to try and answer a single point, helps you from rambling/going too broad

- Controversial issues
  - Even if you don't wish to actively promote the research, others may pick up on it! Be ready
    - Prepare background/FAQ materials
    - Reach out to media folks (e.g., Julie) for help
    - May want to consider a press release of your own first—get ahead of the issue.
  - It may or may not be advantageous to comment
- “What’s important to remember from our research is...”
- Staying on message
  - Make notes to help you stay on track (unless doing a video interview)
    - OK to start over & rephrase your answer
  - Beware of loaded questions
  - Politely correct misstatements; don't accept false facts or incorrect interpretations
    - Never get defensive/combatative/condescending
  - Redirect the conversation to stay on topic, accurate (bridging)
  - It's OK to say “I don't know”—resist the urge to answer something just because it was asked
    - Say “that's outside my expertise” not “no comment”

### Whendee Silver

- Background: is a biogeochemist
  - Had seen a colleague get smeared in the press as a grad student
  - Thus when media folks were contacting her, she was worried about that & not interested in talking to press
  - Published a paper in Science, contacted Berkeley media office (as she had been told to for Science papers)
    - Leaf litter decomposition study; very technical, not great for general consumption
    - Berkeley media person was very talented at rephrasing this into “rotting leaves make major contributions to global climate models”
    - Immediately went viral, ended up being covered all over the place—global news pickup
    - People didn't get the story right → blew up, out of control
      - Front page of Sunday newspaper getting your study wrong isn't something you want to see!
- Afterwards, went out for Leopold training program in communication
  - Helped communication, policy-relevant research
  - Spent time at Google (Google Science Communication Fellow) also learned a lot there
- Advice for young scientists:
  - Communicating science is absolutely critical, but very dangerous for scientists early in their career
    - Avoid it if possible at first
  - Let a more senior colleague or mentor handle it early in your career
    - Requires a lot of training & experience, you will make mistakes

- Thus, better to watch a mentor do it at first
    - Some reporters will help you through your mistakes... others will exacerbate
  - If she gets a call, says she's busy at the moment and asks to call back
    - Then researches the outlet, decides whether to call them back or not (90% of the time she does)
    - Keeps a "message box" by her phone for talking to reporters
  - The "Message Box"
    - Useful tool for framing your science to different audiences
    - The Box: Four questions to have answers for
      - 1. What's the specific problem I'm addressing?
      - 2. So what—why does this matter to my audience?
      - 3. What are your solutions?
      - 4. Who benefits?
    - Can merge multiple studies into your message box
      - She recommends keeping it at a 10<sup>th</sup> grade reading level
  - Audience Q: When should you formulate your message?
    - Absolutely before your press release.
    - Don't talk to the media until your research is about to be published. Nothing that hasn't been peer reviewed and is in press
      - Otherwise, things change
    - Science & Nature have embargo dates
      - You can talk to the media, but let them know the embargo date
      - Make sure they have a reputation for respecting the embargo—if they do not, DON'T TALK TO THEM. These papers could blacklist you for breaking the embargo.
    - Her class works on students making a message for their research—recommends students take it as a senior
  - Audience Q: The concept that you can talk about research even if it's not your own was very useful from your class.
    - If you disagree with something someone else has published though, NEVER disparage them publically.
      - If you're being pushed to talk about them or their research, just don't say anything negative, just say "Brilliant lab, they do good research" and change topic back to your research.
      - Reporters mic are "always on" – not your friend. Some are looking for controversy, and can bring you down in the process if that happens.
  - Why turn reporters down?
    - You just don't have time.
    - She never goes to the media—some of my colleagues do, but I'm more into the science than the communication.
      - I've just communicated when it's important to do. If they're just kind of curious, didn't bother.
    - You've seen them do bad jobs or had a bad experience with them before
    - You can tell they're heading down the road into the wrong story

- Though, you might also say yes—she has done this, to try and correct the bad road.
    - Asked “what’s the story you want to tell?” he said the story, she said “you can tell the story you want to tell, but that’s scientifically very wrong, and it’s going to make you look bad... aren’t you worried about that?”
    - He was very taken aback—said he’d still tell the story he wanted to tell, she took half a day to explain the problems with his narrative to him.
    - He ended up telling a really good story, ended in a much better place.
- Audience Q: Journalists have a tendency to “reduce things” simplify them. We put in a lot of caveats to our conclusions as scientists. What do you do about that?
  - That’s when you have to think very carefully about when how and whether at all to talk to the press
  - If something needs a ton of caveats, might just not be press-ready
    - Stick to stuff that can be major findings or has common sense interpretations/applications.
  - Need to look carefully at what the appropriate way to communicate your results are.
- Audience Q: When you do social research, it feels harder to “shield” yourself with apparent objectivity... also more policy implications
  - Having a peer-reviewed base to “sit on” or justify yourself helps here
  - For policy-makers, 50% of the time I can talk with them and 50% of the time I redirect them to a reporter that’s knowledgeable
    - Can send them scientific papers. People who care about this stuff will read it.
    - This actually gets into another issue—how to write papers so that people can use them!

### **Julie Van Scoy**

- Clarifying sharing “Work in progress”
  - This can be done well when your lab has pictures of you in the field, etc.
  - This should just be “We’re investigating such and such”—avoid revealing research conclusions
  - Ex: Postdoc in ESPM had a very active twitter feed showing his insects, fieldwork, etc. Tweeted out the papers he researched. Built his profile as a researcher this way pretty well.
- Media Channels available
  - Can email Julie to talk about the right outlet—generally she should be your first contact
    - Also Bob Sanders, Manager of Science Communications at Berkeley News
    - She will loop in the “right people”
  - If you know you have a paper coming out, contact her ASAP.
    - Have the general Berkeley people decide if they want to do it
    - Then she’ll decide based on that if they can take it, or if she wants to move forward on it
  - Channels at Berkeley
    - UCB / CNR owned-media

- UCB/CNR press release (give as much notice as possible)
  - Web news item
  - Breakthroughs Magazine (UCB's magazine)
  - California Magazine (alumni magazine)
  - UCANR blogs
  - UCB/CNR Social Media
  - Berkeley Blog
  - Departmental Website
  - Some of these are primarily faculty
  - You will get better coverage from general news items though
  - We can also promote/amplify existing general press coverage or articles
- Social media
  - People are more likely to read & trust stories from known sources
  - Can exist in its own right, or amplify traditional media stories
  - Twitter etc—valuable for peer communications, can set up relationships or conversations with other scientists
    - High-value followers can be just as good as quantity
  - Tailor your message to different platforms
- Campus outlets run by grad students, undergrads; student class projects etc.
- Advanced Media Institute—run by Vicki Hammarstedt
  - They have an audio/podcasting workshops where students need people to interview—Julie can put you in touch with the contact person for this
  - Also have video workshop, general digital media workshop
  - Easier to practice being on point – less likely to try to exploit your participation. Still, be careful on what you say!
  - Can help build a media portfolio—useful for non-academic settings
- Thinking visually
  - Especially valuable for websites, very visual medium
  - Pictures of you doing the research are great... avoid just a picture of you sitting there
  - Document your research as you go
    - Take photos, videos, etc—often you can't go back / replace it!
    - For print, you generally need high-resolution (but if all you have is your phone, still good to document)
  - As you're taking photos, record locations, names of people, ask permission THEN. Carry photo release forms!
    - Otherwise you have to do a lot of backtracking and emailing people at the end
    - Only need a release if you can see their face clearly visible. If they're in the background at a public event (on the street, in a lecture), don't need a release.

### **Peggy Lemaux**

- Focusing here on dealing with controversial topics
- Background: hired as CE Specialist in Biotechnology
  - Position created in to talk to the public about biotech—science communication

- Trained a scientist; runs a full lab, no real training in media, but has been doing this for 20 years
  - Why did this happen in CA first? Northern CA had first field trials of genetically modified organisms, the ice-minus bacteria
    - Mistake: didn't talk to people before doing it first and people reacted negatively
    - Decided they needed someone whose job was to talk to the public pro-actively
- General public unease in past 10 years about science
  - She's most involved in GMOs
  - Beliefs are motivated by emotion, desire to fit in with peer groups—local values and opinions trump science without any clear downside to ignoring it
    - Ex: anti-vaccination activists
    - This is also how science is mediated in our politics & policy
    - This is something you need to keep in mind
  - Thus need to be aware of audience and who you're communicating to, where they're coming from, anticipate what their questions/concerns will be
  - Scientists need to be out there communicating to public now—too much information otherwise
- Example: discredited study on rats developing tumors with GMOs
  - What people are going to take away from this is the pictures of the rats with tumors
  - No one really heard anything after that, even after numerous reports discrediting it happened
- Job is not to take a personal position—just let them know the science, then they can make their own decisions about the conclusions they draw
  - Therefore, a good idea to know the science around the “opposing side” arguments—be prepared to respond to these
  - Know what they're talking about so you can answer their questions from an informed place
  - Scientists need to be prepared to provide answers to the public's scientific questions
    - You will get questions about all sorts of stuff from your general area
    - Stick to the science
- Pointers for effective communication
  - Know your audience & make it relevant to them
    - Information provided needs to be tailored to different sources
  - Keep it simple & use analogies that might be relevant to them
  - Avoid jargon, canned answers
  - If you don't know something, can also get back to them
  - Stay current on issues—know what else is being said out there.
  - Listen to concerns, even if they go well beyond science
  - Stay cool & don't get confrontational—prepare yourself if you're going to be going into a difficult audience. Expect it.
- CLEAR Project—Communication, Literacy, & Education for Agricultural Researcher
  - UC initiative to help teach undergrads, grad students, post-docs to come together and learn how to communicate science.

- Most important thing—listen to people & what they have to say about controversy; avoid canned responses that don't hear them
  - Nice thing about being at a university is you have the ability to say what you want to say—can comment freely without being constrained by organizational beliefs/PR.
  - But, do need to be careful about what you say with the press
    - Again, avoid “filling in the pauses”
    - Hasn't been burned by the press yet!
- Talking to the press is definitely a double-edged sword
  - Want to get information out there, but can damage your rep as a scientist if you do it badly
  - Ex: that study with the cancerous rats, they started talking before it was published.
  - Remember though and keep in mind, even good science can be refuted; it is ever-changing & evolving
- Audience Q: How to deal with a biased reporter once you're in an interview?
  - Stick to science as much as possible.
  - “I can see that your view is not necessarily in line with mine...” Just avoid losing your temper.
  - But, I do my homework before interviewing, and sometimes I do turn them down if they're obviously not going to listen.
- Audience Q: have you ever been quoted with this “as a concession” and ended up looking bad?
  - No, hasn't happened. Often validating them this way and making it clear you can see both sides, they are more likely to listen to you and less likely to “burn” you
    - Can sometimes comment on stuff by specifying that it's “your opinion, not as a scientist/the university”
  - Gently correct them if they say something factually incorrect—this is your job as a scientist
  - But don't try and position yourself as some ultimate source of knowledge, and get too invested in disproving them
- Never do debates
  - You are always put on one side or another; too simple for science
  - Just answer “I am happy to present both sides as I know it”