Only connect:

Reaching new audiences via public relations & external communication

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“Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.”

- E.M. Forster, *Howard’s End*
Who am I?

- Member of UMHS Dept. of Communication
- Trained in biology, science writing & journalism
- 20+ years’ experience publicizing research (U-M, BNL)

What do I do?

- Find & tell stories
- Handle news media inquiries
- Push stories out any way I can
Why does U-M* have staff like me?

Because...

• your work should reach people who care
• your expertise can have impact
• taxpayers & policymakers who fund research need to know what they’re paying for
• most Americans need science/medicine translated
• it’s easier than ever

*and lots of other places too
Science Literacy

- About 20% of Americans can explain what it means to study something scientifically.
- 34% of Americans can describe how to test a drug.
- 55% say that astrology is “not at all scientific” – down from nearly two-thirds in 2010.
- 25% said that genetic modification of crop plants could be “very” or “extremely dangerous.”
- 56% say research involving animals is acceptable.

NSF Science and Engineering Indicators, 2014 report
What do they know?

- Poll published April 2014 by AP; 1,012 adults rated confidence in a scientific concept
- 71% extremely/very confident: mental illness is a medical condition that affects the brain (21% somewhat confident)
- 69% extremely/very confident: genetic code in cells helps determine who we are (22% somewhat confident)
- 53% extremely/very confident: childhood vaccines are safe and effective (30% somewhat confident)
- 31% extremely/very confident: life evolved through natural selection (24% somewhat confident)
An eager audience

- Over 80% of Americans "very" or "moderately" interested in science discoveries
- BUT the percentage who say they follow science/technology news "closely" has declined over the last decade
- 4 in 10 cite the Internet as their #1 source of S&T information
- 50% say the benefits of scientific research have strongly outweighed the harmful results

Mean number of correct answers to trend factual knowledge of science scale: 1992-2012

National Science Foundation
Science and Engineering Indicators 2014
Science & policymakers

- Take aim at ‘wasteful spending’
- Seize on controversies & safety lapses
- Staffers may have little scientific background
- Policy should be based on evidence
Don’t take it from me...

National Academy of Sciences
Committee on Science Literacy and Public Perception of Science

Science Literacy: Concepts, Contexts, and Consequences
August 2016
“Science literacy for individuals, communities, and societies emerges at the interface of the knowledge, attitudes, and motivation of laypeople and the communicative efforts and trustworthiness of scientists.

The scientific community needs to take at least partial responsibility for creating an environment in which science literacy can thrive.”
“We envision a society that is infused by science literacy, not in the sense that every person necessarily knows any specific set of things about biology, chemistry, or physics, but in the sense that there is a shared belief that scientific expertise can be trusted, that scientific misconduct and fraud are rare, and that social organizations can and should be structured to enable science literacy rather than prevent it.”
What do we do?

• **Connect** with faculty about upcoming publications, grants, major events, etc.
• **Plan** the best communication course
• **Write** & get your feedback on what we write
• **Commission or create** visuals
• **Disseminate** content via all appropriate channels -- including reporters & social media
• **Act as intake** for media requests
• **Coach** faculty on media interactions
• **Approach** reporters with ideas or experts
• **Handle** “hot button” issues
Connect via the media

• Press release/blog post on your team’s research
• Expert opinion on a topic in your specialty
• Commenting on research by others or on a societal/policy issue
• In-depth stories on a weighty topic
• Crisis/problem situations
Talking to reporters

- Prepare with PR person
  - three key points
- Use layperson’s terms
  - avoid jargon
  - speak colloquially
- If there’s a press release, use it
- Respect deadlines
- Understand the news outlet
- Respect their independence
The "Scout's honor" embargo system for research news

- Institution/journal reaches out to reporters a few days ahead
- Reporter agrees not to publish or broadcast results until a set date/time
The embargo system

- Increases the newsworthiness of research news
- Gives institutions time to prepare text, graphics, video
- Gives reporters time to prepare stories on complex issues, and increases accuracy/balance
A new era of communication

- Traditional news media’s gatekeeper role is eroding
- Big institutions = trustworthy news sources
- Everyone’s a publisher
Who needs reporters anyway?

- Social media & search
- Institutions & individuals create & share directly
- Visuals are vital
- Fast response to controversy
Our Answer:

Publish U-M content in a way that anyone can freely use (as long as they mention us as the source)
Study Shows How Pneumonia-Causing Superbug Invades

A new discovery about a common and potentially deadly bacterium could one day pave the way for new, needed antibiotics.

Kara Gavin

Latest Articles

Harnessing Immunology to Fight Lethal Pediatric Cancer DIPG

The marriage of immune science and cancer research may improve survival rates for some individuals with rare cancers. A groundbreaking U-M scientist explains more.

Beata Montawdi

‘Game-Changing’ Alzheimer’s Drug Just a First Step

Medicare pays thousands more for the end-of-life care of black and Hispanic people than for whites. A new study tries to find out

Kara Gavin

Top Articles

1. INDUSTRY DX
30% of Female Physicians Report Sexual Harassment at Work

2. HEALTH TECH
Artificial Placenta Holds Promise for Extremely Premature Infants

3. LAB REPORT
Why U.S. Doctors Love Opioids and Hate Marijuana for Chronic Pain

4. LAB REPORT
Discovery of Gut Bacteria in Critically Ill Lungs May Change ICU Care

5. BODY WORK
New Study Emphasizes Harm of Vaccine Refusals

Top Categories

- GENDER
- DEMOGRAPHICS
- CHRONIC PAIN

• 1-2 stories a day
• Easily shareable
• Custom graphics
• Paid social media promotion
• Open copyright
• Always looking for timely and timeless ideas!
Engage directly: Social media for academics

- Connect with others in your field & beyond
- Share new findings, publications, news items, observations, opinions, timely links
- Retain professional tone while engaging
- Get the most out of conferences & events
- Attract potential faculty/trainees
Your essentials

• A robust, updated professional web profile
• Know your PR person & when you should contact us
• Basic LinkedIn profile
• Google yourself/set up alert
Take it to the next level

- Claim Twitter handle, add bio & link
- Share links & posts on LinkedIn and Doximity (for MD/DO)
- Tell your PR person about upcoming papers & timely expertise
- Write a “plain English” web blurb on your research focus and on each paper you publish/talk you give
Choose your level: Laying low

- Start by “lurking” – follow individuals, institutions, organizations, news media
- Monitor Twitter traffic at conferences via hashtags (& use them!)
- **Subscribe** to lists of Twitter users compiled by others in your field
- Join LinkedIn groups for professional societies
Engaging more fully

- **Share links** to your own work & work of others
- **Post slide sets** on your site or SlideShare
- Take part in tweet chats, Reddit AMAs, online campaigns, virtual journal clubs, etc.
- On your *personal* social media, **educate friends** by sharing news/observations
Join

THE CONVERSATION

- Platform to reach the public on timely topics
- Articles created by academics, shaped by professional editors, published under open copyright
- Routinely re-published by major media outlets, from Time and Washington Post to IFL Science
- Easily shared via social media and the web
- Authors can see data on views, republishing
What could happen?

- Connect with others
- Spread knowledge
- Amplify your impact
- Keep up with new ideas & opportunities
- Lend your voice
- Get more from your work
Be careful of...

- Connecting with **patients** on social platforms
- Being too **political/personal** – but DO cite published research
- Engaging in debates/advocacy without knowing the **mechanics** of the platform you’re on
I challenge you…

- Speak their language
- Don’t just hope someone else will do it!
- See it as part of your career
- Only connect.
Resources

NIH Checklist for Communicating Science and Health Research to the Public:
http://umhealth.me/NIHChecklist

AAAS Center for Public Engagement with Science:
http://www.aaas.org/pes

Health News Review:
Toolkit for communicating about health research:
http://www.healthnewsreview.org/toolkit/

Joyce Lee, M.D.’s Slideshares on social media:
http://www.slideshare.net/joyclee/presentations
More resources

Resources for communicating with press & public
http://umhealth.me/mediadiy

Links to guides for writing in plain English:
http://umhealth.me/UMHSeng

Logos, photos, templates
http://med.umich.edu/u/diy

(all behind U-M firewall)
Send ideas!

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