NRM 5302 – Science Communication
Course Syllabus | Fall 2024

Course Information

Instructor
Dr. Maureen Frank
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830-261-0539 (cell, 9-5 daily, can text/call)
Office: RAS 113

Office Hours
M/W, 9:00 – 11:00am, or by appointment

Class Meeting Time and Place
M/W, 2:00 – 3:15pm
RAS 129

Course Description
This is an advanced course on communication methods for conservation professionals who need to share information with diverse groups, including landowners, stakeholders, the media, youth, and the general public. We will cover a broad range of modern communication formats including print, radio, video, and social media.

Expanded Course Description
In today's world, information travels quickly and distance is essentially no barrier to communication. This gives scientists an opportunity to share their work and discoveries to an extent far beyond what was possible before our modern connectivity. At the same time, the ability to quickly spread information can be exploited – through maleficence or naiveté – to the detriment of science communication. A scientist who wishes to be a good communicator will learn to take control of the narrative surrounding his or her own work, engaging in proactive outreach rather than reacting to the communication goals of outside entities.

One challenge that many scientists face is that they lack training in how to communicate their work. Add to this the myriad platforms used by modern society to share information, and sharing the story of science can quickly become an overwhelming prospect. However, the ability to reach diverse audiences is an important skill for any scientist. This course will provide students with knowledge of and experience in many formats of science communication. At the end of this course, students should be able to build a strong narrative about their work and confidently communicate that story to the desired audience using appropriate tools.

Course Objectives

Students will learn techniques for communicating science, with a particular focus on natural resources science. Specifically, upon course completion, students shall understand:
1. How to develop a message that is to be communicated,
2. How to identify the appropriate audience and the needs of that audience, and
3. Strategies and techniques for effectively communicating the desired message.

Student Learning Outcomes, M.S. in Range and Wildlife Management

1. Students will be able to formulate a communication plan to share their research.
2. Students will be able to identify which audience(s) they want or need to reach.
3. Students will be able to communicate clearly using a variety of written and verbal formats.

Course Materials and Policies

Textbooks

The Conservation Professional's Guide to Working with People by Scott Bonar
Available free as an e-book from the SRSU library

Additional readings will be assigned that can be accessed through the SRSU library, are open access, or will be provided by the instructor.

Grading – Points   **Grade Scale**

Class participation (28 @ 10 points each)	280 points	A: 89.5 – 100%
In-class activities (4 @ 25 points each)	100 points	B: 79.5 – 89.4%
Assignments	550 points	C: 69.5 – 79.4%
Final project	220 points	D: 59.5 – 69.4%
		F: < 59.4%

Due Dates and Extensions

Due dates should be honored by the student and no points will be given for late assignments. However, students involved in fieldwork may need flexibility and, in most cases, we can arrange an alternative plan. **The student must initiate contact with the instructor ahead of time** to request an exception for late work. See the class schedule in this syllabus for due dates. If any dates are changed, this will be shared with the students and posted on Blackboard.

Activities and Assignments

One of the goals of this class is to provide students not just with a knowledge of different forms of communication but with experience using those different forms. Depending on the topic, some practice is more amenable to being completed as homework while other practice is best facilitated in the classroom. In-class activities are generally worth fewer points to account for the fact that they take less time and are "rough" compared to a polished homework assignment. There will also be a final project in lieu of a final exam.

In-class activities

Activities that are better suited for in-class practice include developing a message, identifying an audience, writing a press release, and answering interview questions in different formats. These will be done in weeks 2-5.

Assignments

Communication formats that require more thought, time, resources, and/or refinement will be practiced outside of class. This will include writing a newspaper article, creating social media posts, creating visual media, writing code to produce a scientific figure, writing a research report, developing an oral presentation, and writing the narrative for a grant application. Students will also write a report on the assigned chapters from The Conservation Professional's Guide to Working with People by Scott Bonar.

Final project

Students will choose a communication format to share their research with other Sul Ross students, faculty, and the general public. This will be presented on the last day of class and open to community attendance. More information on the final project will be given in class.

Academic Integrity

Students in this class are expected to demonstrate scholarly behavior and academic honesty in the use of intellectual property. A scholar is expected to be punctual, prepared, and focused; meaningful and pertinent participation is appreciated. Examples of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to: turning in work as original that was used in whole or part for another course and/or professor; turning in another person's work as one's own; copying from professional works or internet sites without citation; collaborating on a course assignment, examination, or quiz when collaboration is forbidden.

General Expectations

As this is a graduate-level course, I have high expectations for all students. This includes quality, graduate-level writing and that you will seek assistance from the university help center on writing projects if needed. I will provide you with prompt and meaningful feedback on your assignments.

Some of the topics we discuss in this course will be contentious and there will probably be many different points of view amongst the class. As we cover these topics, I expect you to:
- Treat your classmates with respect, even if you do not agree with their viewpoints
- Defend your own opinions with logical rhetoric and not fallacies
- Avoid all ad hominem attacks, insults, or other derogatory comments against a person

You can expect the instructor to:
- Serve as a moderator
- Provide current scientific information
- Articulate where science ends and policy or opinion begin
- Remain neutral in most discussions; if I give an opinion, you can expect me to show the same respect that I expect from you.

Communication

You are required to check your **Sul Ross e-mail** and **Blackboard** announcements several times per week. We do not use the personal or preferred e-mail addresses that you may have on record with the University.

SRSU Distance Education Statement

Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, such as library resources, online databases, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website. Students should correspond using Sul Ross email accounts and submit online assignments through Blackboard, which requires secure login. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website. Directions for filing a student complaint are located in the student handbook.

Resources

SRSU Disability Services (ADA Statement)

Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. Alpine Students seeking accessibility/accommodations services must contact Mary Schwartze, LPC, SRSU's Accessibility Services Coordinator at 432-837-8203, or email mschwartze@sulross.edu. Our office is located on the first floor of Ferguson Hall – room 112, and our mailing address is P.O. Box C122, Sul Ross State University, Alpine. Texas, 79832.

Counseling Services

Sul Ross State University (SRSU) has partnered with TimelyCare, which is an online mental health support platform, and all SRSU students will have access to nine free counseling sessions. These can be accessed by visiting https://timelycare.com/srsu. Counseling is also offered in Ferguson Hall Room 112 in Alpine, and via telehealth Zoom sessions for remote students.

Library Information

The Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library in Alpine offers FREE resources and services to the entire SRSU community. Access and borrow books, articles, and more by visiting the library's website, library.sulross.edu. Off-campus access requires logging in with your LoboID and

password. Librarians are a tremendous resource for your coursework and can be reached in person, by email (srsulibrary@sulross.edu), or phone (432-837-8123).

Tutoring

If you need help with writing, please contact Graduate Student Support Services: gradcenter@sulross.edu or (432) 837-8524.

Blackboard Support Desk

If you have any technical issues with Blackboard itself, the Blackboard Support Desk is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can reach the support desk by calling (888) 837-6055, emailing blackboardsupport@sulross.edu, using resources from the Technology Support tab within Blackboard, or clicking the Support Desk graphic on the course homepage.

Tentative Course Schedule

Subject to change, please check Blackboard for updates.

Week	Dates	Topic	Assignments Due (on Monday)
1	8/26, 28	Introduction and theory	--
2	9/2, 4	Messages and audiences	Bonar, Ch. 1-3
3	9/9, 11	News and other print	Bonar, Ch. 4-6
4	9/16, 18	Television and video	Newspaper article
5	9/23, 25	Radio and podcasts	Book report
6	9/30, 10/2	Social media and blogs	--
7	10/7, 9	Photography and art	Social media posts
8	10/14, 16	Infographics and figures	Visual aids
9	10/21, 23	Lay reports	Figure and code
10	10/28, 30	Oral presentations	Research report article
11	11/4, 6	Audience focus: funders	Presentation
12	11/11, 13	Audience focus: landowners	Grant application
13	11/18, 20	Audience focus: youth	--
14	11/25	Evaluating and measuring	*Happy Thanksgiving!*
15	12/2, 4	Practice and final project	Final project