

Research Communications Council Minutes November 10, 2017

The Process of Conducting Science

Mark Ryan, Executive Director of the Prairie Research Institute, was November's featured guest. Mark is a wildlife biologist and an expert in conservation and natural resources, and he discussed the process of conducting science and why it matters to communicators. Part of Mark's presentation included an active learning exercise that invited participation from the group. Highlights from the discussion included:

Scientific Method Overview

- What is science? It's not a thing but an [ongoing process](#) through which we build upon previous work and discover new knowledge.
- Anyone can be a scientist—curiosity is the only requirement.
- It starts with observations and questions, proceeds to hypothesis, then to experiments designed to tease out the necessary data for theories that may explain the original observations.
- Goal is to build a whole research program—a series of experiments to parse out answers.
- Complications arise in creating experiments in labs that mimic the real world—involves tradeoffs.

Important Points to Consider for Communicators

- What underlying assumptions are scientists making?
- How do scientists control for variables—easier in the lab; the field is “messier.”
- Get into the weeds (sample size, variables)—science is complex. Ask questions.
- Interview someone who is not involved in the study.
- Consider educating about the scientific process.
- It's difficult to get these types of these in a general story—often don't have time to talk about things like sample size.
- Sometimes the process itself can be the story. Where does the differentiation happen?
- Creativity and courage during the process—what did you do differently? What didn't work?
- There is a tremendous creative aspect to formulating a question and then creating tests to tease out an answer.

Also, please note: the National Academies has a publication about “Scientific Literacy” that may be of interest to communicators: <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/23595/science-literacy-concepts-contexts-and-consequences>

Updates from the OVCR

Research Communications Council Featured in EAB

- RCC made the latest edition of the EAB's University Research Forum! The report provides valuable tactics for communicating the value of university of research. Access the report [here](#) but don't share this beyond the University as it is restricted.

November Book Club

- This month's book club was on Thursday, November 16, at the Prairie Research Institute (room location TBD). Our discussion focused on "Rigor Mortis: How Sloppy Science Creates Worthless Cures, Crushes Hope, and Wastes Billions" by NPR Correspondent Richard Harris. Please send book suggestions to [Melissa Edwards](#) for the next meeting in February.

NASW Idea Grants

- The National Association of Science Writers invites proposals from individuals or groups to apply for grants ranging from \$1,000 to \$50,000 for projects and programs designed to help science writers in their professional lives and to benefit the field of science writing. The proposal deadline is December 15, 2017. Find full details [here](#).

Updates from the Group

College of ACES

- Germán Bollero, Department Head for Crop Sciences, will be the new Associate Dean for Research.

News Bureau

- In October, Public Affairs published Postmarks, a semi-annual publication distributed to parents of students. This feature focused on undergraduate research conducted at Illinois. Find stories from the latest publication [here](#).
- Several faculty from the Social and Behavioral Sciences Research Initiative have agreed to form a Scientific Advisory Board for the News Bureau. The board will provide advice on the scientific rigor behind studies in the social and behavior sciences, which will help News Bureau writers better evaluate new findings and make decisions on coverage.

Office of the Provost

- Help the Office of the Provost acknowledge and publicize faculty achievements. Forward any of your unit's faculty awards via this [online form](#).

Office of Corporate Relations

- The OCR has hired Rashmi Tenneti as the Assistant Director of Marketing and Communications. Rashmi will be responsible for communications supporting the OCR and units across campus. She is a certified digital marketing expert with training in content creation, branding strategies, analytics, and advertisement strategies.

iSEE

- CABBI is the Center for Advanced Bioenergy and Bioproduct Innovation. Funded by a \$115 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy, this Bioenergy Research Center's mission is to provide breakthroughs scientific breakthroughs for a new generation of sustainable, cost-effective biofuels and bioproducts. Find additional information at CABBI's [website](#).
- The Certified Green Office Program helps Illinois employees update their workspace habits to reduce consumption of water, energy, paper, plastic, and other supplies. Any group that occupies space in a campus building or is a University of Illinois affiliate is eligible to become a Certified Green Office. Find more details [here](#).