## **Public Science Communication Project**

Science is a complicated and often intimidating field. Many members of the American public feel that science is beyond their understanding, and many scientists have not helped change that line of thinking. It is not helpful that most scientific communication is

* filled with technical jargon,
* unemotionally objective, or
* hidden behind pay walls accessibly only through universities or high membership fees.

When science is communicated to the public, it’s often watered down so much that it hardly resembles the original research, as in media reports, or scientists themselves talk about “dumbing it down” and using science to “correct the ignorant public.” Science then gets the label of being an elitist, exclusive club that is impossible to join. We know here that this is not true, but it’s easy to fall into the trap of this kind of binary thinking—science is right/smart/better and everything else is the opposite (wrong/dumb/worse).

In order to help with this important issue, you’ll become a public science advocate; you’ll create a public project that will not dumb down science but instead make it appropriate information for an audience who is not “wrong” but may have different perspectives, experience, and interests from you, the scientist.

 Your main assignment is to **create a public project** (any format that could be called *public*—such as a newspaper or magazine article complete with photos for a popular source, a video for any non-expert audience, a website with interactive games, a brochure or [post](https://oldcourses.isucomm.iastate.edu/mod/glossary/showentry.php?eid=5936&displayformat=dictionary)er, a classroom lesson for any age range, a science center interactive display plan, a radio or TV public service announcement) that you can use **to open dialogue with, offer information to, and ask for action from a specific audience in the public**about **an issue in science that you’re passionate about** (so the topic is also up to you).

**Learning goals for this project**

* You will argue persuasively to a public, non-scientist audience.
* You will analyze the credibility of different sources and viewpoints.
* You will synthesize different sources and viewpoints.
* Your arguments will communicate effectively in these modes: Written, Oral, Visual and Electronic in the form of a professional product.
* You will repurpose the same information into different genres (blog, abstract, report, presentation, and a deliverable). This requires analysis of what is important for each method of communication.

**Assignment requirements**

Briefly, here’s what you will be doing. Each piece of the assignment is described in more detail below.

**Part A: Prewriting** (40 points)

1. Blog Post, due 11/18
2. Research into the conversation, due 11/30

**Part B: The final project** (40 points)

1. Deliverable, due 12/2
2. Presentation, due 12/2

**Group teamwork** (20 points)

**Part A.  Prewriting (points)**

**1.Blog**[**post**](https://oldcourses.isucomm.iastate.edu/mod/glossary/showentry.php?eid=5936&displayformat=dictionary)**s and responses (**For this assignment, choose one person’s website.)--**20 pts**

Your blog [post](https://courses.isucomm.iastate.edu/mod/glossary/showentry.php?courseid=2983&eid=5936&displayformat=dictionary) is due by ***11/18***. (Early [post](https://courses.isucomm.iastate.edu/mod/glossary/showentry.php?courseid=2983&eid=5936&displayformat=dictionary)s accepted and encouraged!)  Each member of the group will contribute in some way to the blog—whether the original post, responses, visuals, or links to research, etc. The group should monitor responses to see which ones need reactions or replies. Respond to those by class time on ***11/30***.  Continue the conversation as long as it is profitable.

Each **individual** should respond/comment/ask questions in a meaningful way to the [post](https://courses.isucomm.iastate.edu/mod/glossary/showentry.php?courseid=2983&eid=5936&displayformat=dictionary)s of your other classmates by ***11/28***.  When you respond to your classmates, tell them whether they have convinced you of the importance of their issue, and explain why or why not. Tell them whether you think they can defend their stand—what potential objections do you see their audience having?  (Do you have objections or a difference in opinion?)  Give them suggestions for how they could make a better argument if you think that’s possible.  If you think the issue is not something that is important, you can express that (in a civil way).  And they can agree to disagree.  We will be arguing ideas, though, not people!  Ideas are open to healthy debate.  People should not be attacked or belittled in the name of defending ideas, no matter what you see in some blogs!

 **2.Research into “the conversation”--20 pts (due 11/30)**

This will be where you demonstrate your knowledge of what other people have said about this issue and how you can contribute to the conversation.  Locate a public discussion of your topic (in newspapers, news shows, blogs, research articles, etc.).  Find out what people are saying, focusing in particular on people who have different views than you do. Research what experts are saying about the same topic. In a well-written 3-4 page, double spaced report, write about

* how you found the views represented by science experts (short summaries of positions would be helpful)
* what you learned about the general public by paying attention to what they are saying about these issues
* what your field can and should do to address the issue (what message needs to be sent, how, and to which audience for most effectiveness)

It is important for you to include citations. You should cite **at least 4 different sources (including more than one authority)** in order to **begin**to ground yourself in the conversation (Note: if you’re looking at a blog or article of interest, check out their citations for ideas about where you might find more sources).  Remember that your purpose with this assignment is to argue in favor of good science, not sensationalism.  So the authorities you cite should have significant ethos in the field and your project should argue for proper understanding of good science.

At the top of your report, as part of the heading information like your name, our class name, etc., list what citation style you have chosen.  Then make sure you stick to it!

**Part B  The final project**

 **3. Your deliverable--20 points (due 12/2)**

An appropriately formatted, well-designed project with persuasive impact for a non-science audience.

 **4. Show and tell--20 pts (due 12/2 and 12/5)**

This will be an opportunity for you to show the class what you did.  You will present to the class, in a professional manner, what your project is (you can show it to us in any way that makes sense for your format).  As you discuss your project, you will focus on several key points:

* how you got involved in this conversation and why
* what credible sources are saying about your topic (both pros and cons)
* who, exactly, your intended audience is
* your design and textual choices

**5. Group teamwork 20 pts**

I will ask you to turn in group evaluation forms like we did for the poster project.