

WCRP OPEN SCIENCE CONFERENCE

CLIMATE RESEARCH IN SERVICE TO SOCIETY

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conference2011.wcrp-climate.org



OSC ESC luncheon – Communicating Climate Science to the Media and Public

Panelists:

Alexandra Witze

Contributing editor, Science News

Patrick Luganda

Chair Network Climate Journalists in the Greater Horn of Africa (NECJOGHA)

Andrew Freedman

Managing Editor of Online Content and Climate Policy Analyst

Professor Dave Griggs

CEO ClimateWorks Australia & Director Monash Sustainability Institute

Moderator:

Matt Hirschland – Director of UCAR Communications,

This event, sponsored by the American Meteorological Society (AMS), took place at lunchtime on Wednesday of the WCRP Open Science Conference. A panel of professional experts in communicating science presented their views and advice, followed by a question and answer period. An estimated 150 early career scientists (ECS) attended.

Introductory remarks were made by Dr Xueban Zeng, U Arizona, representing the AMS that sponsored the event – Dr Zeng reported that there was good news for ECS – AMS was

reducing page charges; he encouraged all ECS to join AMS because it serves as a platform to contribute to community.

As an introduction, the panelist gave their views on the current media landscape vis a vis communicating climate science:

- There are now tremendous opportunities for ECSs to take major role in communicating online; or cultivating relationships with reporters to become a trusted source to interpret your work or that of others.
- Number of mainstream journalists has dropped which may be bad for journalists, but has opened up new opportunities for for scientists in the form of blogs and alternative reporting
- If you as scientist want to get your message out, it is an unparalleled time for using the internet. Many articles even in the New York Times are influenced by a blog.
- Climate scientists assume that people are listening, however, just getting info out is not going to change people's minds.
- Journalism is about stories – people, societal relevance – and we must become better story-tellers.

Many good pieces of advice and lessons learned were shared:

- When talking to media, scientists should lead with what they know, what they are sure about, and not the uncertainties; from journalists' perspective – you are burying your lead if you fail to do this; don't bury uncertainties, but structure info differently.
- Identify which media outlets, decision makers, are receptive to your message and work with them and develop long-term relationships, not just transactional ones.
- Many universities and institutions have communications officers who can help you navigate this field, prepare yourself and your messages.
- Many media/communications training opportunities exist – call university public affairs office – AGU; many fellowships e.g., AAAS mass media fellowship; Stanford programme; NSF; congressional fellowships
- Great communicators are not born, they are created. Becoming great is an investment in you and your science.
- Lot of bad news around; better to go for good news.
- It is our (scientists') responsibility to help journalist learn about climate and there is an appetite to learn – we need to organize ourselves to do that training.
- Step up to the plate; we need you; understand there is a reward for talking to journalist and communicating as a means to sharing the impact of your work.
- There is an institutional inertia that does not always adequately recognize this contribution and this must change.
- If a journalists calls you – you are not having a conversation; be certain about your message. It is ok to ask for a few minutes, organize your thoughts and ring him/her back.

- Read a lot – blogs, history; business publications to get perspective on this climate debate – how it fits in the larger context of societal and economic discussions and realities.
- Learn from those who are good at communicating.
- Learn basic rules of journalism.
- Scientists must learn when to stop talking; be prepared; communicate clearly.