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NEWS

Communicating Science

Rutgers will teach researchers how to explain the significance of their work more clearly

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Researchers conduct great science in the lab every day. But they generally get low grades for explaining their achievements.



"Communicating Science," which will debut next spring, will teach advanced doctoral candidates at Rutgers' Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences how to connect with various audiences when discussing their research.

Concerned over this long-acknowledged [weakness among researchers](#), Rutgers scientists and nonscientists are collaborating to teach communications skills to biomedical researchers closing in on their doctoral degrees.

"Unfortunately, the time our young scientists spend learning to communicate their research pales in comparison to time spent learning and conducting it," says Nicholas Ponzio, a Rutgers New Jersey Medical School immunologist leading the effort, who recently spent six months studying the subject as a visiting professor at the [Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science](#) at Stony Brook University.

With input from Rutgers faculty at [Robert Wood Johnson Medical School](#), the [Mason Gross School of the Arts](#), [School of Communication and Information](#), and [School of Environmental and Biological Sciences](#), Ponzio is developing

a course to debut next spring called "Communicating Science." The class, designed for advanced doctoral candidates at Rutgers' [Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences](#), is supported by a [Burroughs Wellcome Fund](#) grant for Training in Advanced Communication Skills for Career Transitions, one of only seven awards that were selected for funding for this program in 2016.

"Communicating Science" will teach graduate students how to create presentations for various audiences that are easy to understand, avoid technical jargon and clearly explain the significance and potential benefits of their research, Ponzio said. Students will also learn storytelling techniques to engage audiences and develop a narrative that "connects" with their listeners.

"This will also give researchers the confidence to speak out beyond their scientific audience, and embrace the responsibility to explain their science to the public, the media, industry, elected officials, and potential donors who support biomedical research," said Ponzio, a long-time member of the Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences [Master Educators' Guild](#).

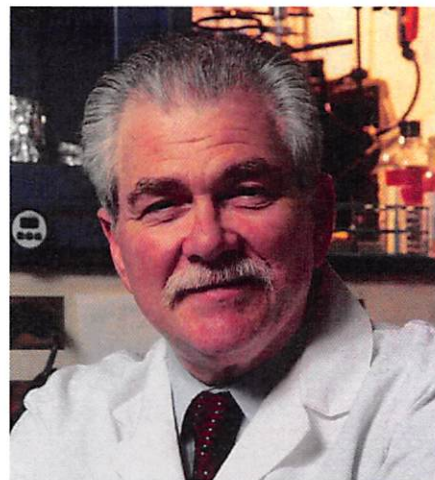
Ponzio noted that biopharmaceutical hiring managers, have confided in him about the lack of effective communication skills among researchers seeking to launch their professional careers.

“Communication skills are essential because people have more confidence in, and are more apt to be influenced by, people who can explain their research clearly,” said Ponzio. “Such training will better prepare our doctoral graduates to be highly competitive for academic and private sector positions,” Ponzio said.

Ponzio sees “Communicating Science” as the starting point for a larger communications curriculum at Rutgers that eventually could lead to a certificate in science communication and accommodate doctoral students whose primary language is not English.

Kathleen Scotto, dean of the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, explained that the many ways in which we receive news and information has changed the manner in which scientists need to communicate.

“We are closer as a society,” she said, “and that requires better communication. We need to communicate why our science is important if we expect taxpayers and benefactors to support our research and industry to look to us for innovative ideas and workforce development.”



New Jersey Medical School immunologist Nicholas Ponzio is working with scientists and nonscientists to develop the course, after studying the subject at the Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science.

For media inquiries, contact Jeff Tolvin at 973-972-4501, 908-229-3475 or jeff.tolvin@rutgers.edu

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