

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

purposes and methods

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The Open University

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The Open University



A thousand flowers blooming

- Rapid development in training course for intending SC professionals, in the UK and beyond
- Development largely autonomous and mildly competitive but with common aims and audiences
- In the main, face-to-face full time provision, using the more conventional methods of delivery
- European Network for Science Communication Teachers (ENSCOT)



'distance learning' science communication courses

- Two particular case studies ...
- The Open University UK (distance learning)
(Master course 3 year part time study)
now contributing to an MSc in Science and Society
- and Birkbeck College (F 2 F with distance learning)
(PG Diploma, via 2 years part time study)



Some defining features of studying at a distance

- dispersed class; limited amount of face to face provision... focusing on those taught elements that can't be addressed in any other way
- reliance on texts/TV/radio and increasingly on line provisionand an example of the power and impact of TV
- some skills elements - for example, shared writing exercises more difficult if done remotely... though electronic networking increasingly important - e.g., poster presentation.
- maximises opportunities for combining working and studying



S802 Science and the Public

- Set of contemporary case studies - especially written commentaries that guide students through selected papers
- set of issues such as risk, moral responsibility of scientists, science education -
- and a set of debates such as science promotion, science dialogue, public consultations
- weekend of f2f contact with tutors and central OU staff
- online conferencing system that links dispersed student population
- Approximately 600 hours of study per year for 3 years



Our heterogeneous audience

- the well-established principle of openness doesn't operate in quite the same way at PG level
- graduates from the OU and elsewhere, with varying intentions
- science graduates, looking to broaden and deepen their understanding of science
- as opposed to those who are current or intending SC professionals



Birkbeck's Diploma in Science Communication

- Approximately 50% face to face contact, over a 2 year period
- Mix theoretical platform in year 1 with a skills focus in Year 2
- Highlighting TV and radio, presentation skills
- Approximately 200 hrs of study per year
- Transition course for those keen on the idea of a mid-career 'escape/progression' from the lab....



Purpose and methods

- a sustained demand for science communicators?
- of what type and for what purpose - journalistic, TV/radio work, charitable foundations, public consultation experts?
- a higher, more urgent purpose; creating greater awareness amongst bench scientists of science and society issues
- cultural shifts to broaden perspective - of ethics, of nature of science, of SSK, etc
- and need such provision be award-bearing?
- developing new methods of engaging scientists - using part time study, IT methods, networking, relying less on F2F.

Future visions (circa 1898)

