



**SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT
AND SUSTAINABILITY**



Microcredit course prospectus

Foundations in science communication

Communicating your research to the right people, at the right times, and in the right ways, ensures that it has value and impact beyond academia, and that it supports positive change in policy, practice and behaviour.

With a focus on humanising science, and the people who do it, this facilitated online course invites researchers to explore and develop the powerful stories that help audiences connect with their work. It pairs this human focus with practical tools for strategically, cost-effectively and professionally communicating with non-specialist audiences and the media.

Brendon Bosworth & Tali Hoffman

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Who we are

Tali Hoffman and Brendon Bosworth are communication consultants working to bring the worlds of science and communication closer together.



With a PhD in Zoology **Tali Hoffman** is able to understand and interpret the technical details and complexity of a wide range of scientific disciplines. Through a decade of working as a science communicator she has also honed her abilities to make that science more relatable and accessible to diverse audiences. Tali is as confident communicating science in the spotlight – on television, on the radio and in public speaking fora – as she is developing professional and cost-effective communications products. Her passion for teaching and experience as a trainer allows her to successfully help others to build their capacities in these same areas.

tali.s.hoffman@gmail.com



Brendon Bosworth believes that academic research needs to be paired with a softer, more human approach that relies on the power of storytelling to bring science to life. Brendon has 10 years' experience as a journalist, editor, and communicator with a focus on urbanisation, climate change, and sustainable development. His work inside and outside of research institutions, locally and abroad, has allowed him to identify the challenges and opportunities for creating better synergies between researchers and non-specialist audiences.

brendon@humanelementcommunications.com

Course details

This facilitated course blends online learning with interpersonal engagement

Over 5 weeks (10-12 notional hours per week), we provide a collaborative and supportive learning environment. Students complete weekly text and video lessons online, using the course platform. They participate in facilitated group sessions via Zoom, where they have the opportunity to practice key skills such as storytelling and media interviews for assessment in a supportive environment. Required assignments are submitted online.

Course schedule

- **Week 1:** Introduction and Strategy Chapter (22 March - 25 March)
- **Week 2:** Storytelling chapter (28 March - 1 April)
- **Week 3 and 4:** Media Chapter (4 - 15 April)
- **Week 5:** Strategy Chapter (revisited) and Toolbox Chapter (18 - 21 April)

The course chapters help researchers to:

- Develop impact-focused communication strategies that target key audiences and cater to their specific information needs (Strategy Chapter)
- Identify and convey the core messages in their research in compelling and relatable ways (Stories Chapter)
- More effectively and confidently communicate with the media (Media Chapter)
- Understand how to effectively develop a wide range of communications products (Toolbox Chapter)

Participants are required to:

- Allocate 10-12 notional hours per week for 5 weeks
- Work through all online lessons
- Attend four group sessions (facilitated over Zoom; average of one per week)
- Do all assignments according to the specified timelines



Strategy Chapter

Taking a strategic approach helps researchers to consider how their communication efforts can yield the greatest impact on the most important audiences.

In this chapter we discuss how to develop a communication strategy that (1) has specific and measurable communication goals, (2) identifies the target audiences that can help to reach those goals, (3) determines which tactics to follow to best reach those audiences, and (4) evaluates the effectiveness of the communication efforts.

Participants then use these strategic skills to begin developing their own communication strategy.

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

- Learn to conceptualise and articulate specific communication goals (e.g., on policy, practice, behaviour).
- Learn to identify the specific audiences that need to be reached in order to reach those goals, and the actions these audiences need to take.
- Learn to analyse the information needs of each audience to determine the content, format and dissemination timing that will be most effective at reaching those audiences.
- Learn to evaluate the communication efforts in meaningful ways and over useful timeframes.



Stories Chapter

Humans understand the world through stories. But when researchers want to communicate about complex research, it can be difficult to identify and tell the powerful stories that help audiences connect with their work.

This chapter explores the power of storytelling. It covers the fundamentals of what a story is and how different types of stories can be used to animate and humanise research. We prompt researchers to look at and reflect upon their own stories so they can tell these in a way that invites others to see them as people with values, ideas, and concerns.

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

- Learn to identify different types of stories within their research, and apply storytelling techniques to communicate their research to non-specialists.
- Learn to identify and develop their “personal narratives” in order to integrate these into their public communication efforts.
- Reflect on the values that inform their work, and consider how to incorporate these into their communications.



Media Chapter

A deeper understanding of the news media builds the capacity of researchers to confidently perform media interviews, publicise their research findings, and ultimately become respected experts in the media space. In this chapter, through a combination of instructional lessons and hands-on assignments, participants learn how the media works, how news stories are constructed, and how to better communicate with the press.

Many researchers find media interviews intimidating, with the thought of speaking on television or the radio bringing up insecurities. We provide tools and techniques for staying calm and focused during interviews. Participants take part in a simulated television interview, getting an opportunity to practice being in the spotlight and learning how to share their knowledge confidently and clearly in these often-uncomfortable settings. Throughout, we create a supportive environment that helps participants overcome discomfort.

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

- Gain improved understanding of media practices, processes, and the news cycle so that they are equipped to effectively communicate with journalists and provide them with relevant information about their research.
- Evaluate their professional relationship with the media in order to strengthen their capacities to interface with the media and share their research with the public.
- Formulate a set of key messages and soundbites related to their core research which can be used for media interviews, public speaking, and writing for popular media.
- Learn to evaluate the newsworthiness of their work to increase the likelihood of getting media coverage.
- Improve their ability to prepare for and confidently conduct media interviews – be they print, TV or radio – and effectively convey impactful messages to the press.
- Learn how to use voice control, breath control, and other physical techniques to reduce their public-speaking anxiety.



Toolbox Chapter

Working with specialists to develop high-quality communications products can be prohibitively costly. Yet many products can be developed in-house, at low cost, and to a professional standard. In this chapter we unpack our communication toolbox, demonstrating how participants can develop a range of effective products using readily-available software.

We focus on some of the 'usual suspects' of communication, such as presentations, posters and policy briefs, focusing on how to better prepare and deliver these. We explore how to write effective articles for the popular press, particularly for high-impact publications. We discuss how to use social media for impact, and demonstrate and discuss techniques for taking photographs, producing films, animations, podcasts and infographics. Lastly, we discuss some creative forms of communication that are captivating yet seldom considered.

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

- Learn how strategy, storytelling, high-quality visuals, and well-prepared delivery can make presentations, policy briefs and webinars more engaging, understandable, and memorable.
- Improve their non-scientific writing ability, and gain an understanding of the different styles used in different communications products (e.g., popular press articles, scripts) to keep audiences engaged.
- Learn about the importance of developing a social media strategy, the way to use different social media platforms to help achieve specific communication goals, and how to develop an online identity with a consistent and genuine "voice".
- Learn about the basics of photography and video-making (composition, lighting, etc.).
- Learn why animations can be so effective at communicating science, when (and when not to) use them, and the key steps involved in making them.
- Learn the basics of developing engaging and informative podcasts.
- Learn how to use storytelling and improved data visualisations to develop impact-focused infographics.
- Learn about some innovative and underused communication techniques.

Timing

Key date for lessons, assignments, and group sessions

Week 1: Introduction and Strategy Chapter (22 March - 25 March; 10-12 notional hours)

- **Tuesday 22 March** - Group session 1 (Introduction to the course): 09h00-10h30 (GMT -6) / 17h00-18h30 (GMT +2)
- **Friday 25 March** - Complete the week's lessons and submit Assignment 1

Week 2: Storytelling Chapter (28 March -1 April; 10-12 notional hours)

- **Wednesday 30 March** - Complete the week's lessons and complete Assignment 2
- **Thursday 1 April** - Group session 2 (Tell your story): 09h00-10h30 (GMT -6) / 17h00-18h30 (GMT +2)

Weeks 3 and 4: Media Chapter (4-15 April; 20-24 notional hours)

- **Monday 11 April** - Complete the week's lessons and complete Assignments 3, 4, 5
- **Tuesday 12 or Wednesday 13 April** - Group session 3 (Simulated TV interview): 09h00-10h30 (GMT -6) / 17h00-18h30 (GMT +2)

Week 5: Strategy Chapter revisited and Toolbox Chapter (28 March - 1 April; 10-12 notional hours)

- **Wednesday 20 April** - Complete the week's lessons and submit Assignment 6
- **Thursday 21 April** - Group session 4 (Strategies and Tools): 09h00-10h30 (GMT -6) / 17h00-18h30 (GMT +2)

**A full course syllabus will be sent to all students*



School and University policy statements

University level requirements for the delivery of academic courses, and the assessment of student learning including conduct of examinations is governed by the [academic courses policy](#).

Integrity in a remote learning context

Although the face of teaching and learning has changed due to covid-19, the rules and principles governing academic integrity remain the same. If you ever have questions about what may or may not be permitted, ask your instructor. Students have found it especially important to clarify rules related to exams administered remotely and to follow these carefully and completely.

The University of Saskatchewan is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Student Conduct & Appeals section of the University Secretary Website and avoid any behavior that could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.

All students should read and be familiar with the [Regulations on Academic Student Misconduct](#) as well as the [Standard of Student Conduct in Non-Academic Matters and Procedures for Resolution of Complaints and Appeals](#).

For more information on what academic integrity means for students see the Academic Integrity section of the [University Library Website](#).

You are encouraged to complete the [Academic Integrity Tutorial](#) to understand the fundamental values of academic integrity and how to be a responsible scholar and member of the USask community.