

UCF Launches Podcast Series to Help Researchers Communicate Science to General Public

ORLANDO, Sept. 9, 2019 – The University of Central Florida Office of Research has launched a 10-part podcast series called Research Decoded to help researchers communicate their work.

“Communicating your work and its impact on the world is a critical skill each researcher needs to have,” said Elizabeth Klonoff, Vice President for the Office of Research and Dean of the College of Graduate Studies. “Communicating and using the different tools of communication is important because our communities need to understand not only what each project means, but its impact on our world, good or bad. Then they can be advocates for changing our world.”

The need to help educate the general public about science in general and UCF’s contributions in particular is why the Office of Research created the series, which is available on the Office of Research [Communications](#) website.

The series is meant to provide researchers, both faculty and students, with tips and examples of how to communicate their work. No episode is longer than 20 minutes and most are under 15. Reporters, professors from various fields, students and public relation experts provide examples and tips to get started. Research Decoded host Rachel Wimmer takes listeners on a journey that covers everything from how to ditch jargon and ace an interview with a reporter to the role of social media and how to work with university communicators among other topics.

These strategies are important, says Pamela Wisniewski, an assistant professor in UCF’s College of Engineering and Computer Science and one of the researchers interviewed in the series.

“Often, we measure impact in terms our google scholar H-index and our citation counts or the impact factor of journal, but realistically we need to talk more about our broader impact on society and being able to communicate effectively in a way that makes a difference to the general population as well, as it can inform policies and practices that are being used in the world,” says Wisniewski.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine put it this way in its Communicating Science Effectively Report:

“Science and technology are embedded in virtually every aspect of modern life. As a result, people face an increasing need to integrate information from science with their personal values and other considerations as they make important life decisions about medical care, the safety of foods, what to do about climate change, and many other issues.”

The episodes:

What is science communications?

A short introduction into the world of science communication. What is it? Why it matters and what are some of the barriers of effectively communicating science.

What's Your So What?

Sometimes it can be difficult for researchers to separate themselves from the nitty gritty details of their research to create an overarching picture of why the work is important. This episode looks at how to dissect the most important components of a research project to help create a story that explains why it matters to everyone.

Ditch the Jargon

The greatest challenge in communicating research is figuring out how to best translate the science in such a way that it can be understood by a general audience, while still remaining accurate. Learn some techniques that can be used to communicate complex scientific ideas to the general public.

Reaching your Audience

It is always important to keep your target audience in mind, including their background knowledge, interest in the topic, and your goals in communicating with them. This episode explores ways research can be translated for a number of different audiences from the media and legislators to donors and children.

It's How You Frame It

An important step in connecting your science to the media is learning how to best frame your work. In this episode, we explore how to best frame your research to develop successful media pitches that will bring your press.

Share Your Story

When reporters are looking for leads, they aren't looking for p-values and correlations. They are looking for a story. This episode discusses how we can look beyond facts and results to shape an engaging research story.

Ace Your Interview

Whether it's your first or your tenth, interviews can be intimidating. This episode walks you through not only what to expect when being interviewed for different media platforms, but also things like what to wear if you'll be on camera, what kinds of questions to expect and using your voice to tell the story.

New Media

The growth of social media over the past decade has completely changed the game in which we seek out and digest information. This episode outlines the importance of using the new forms of digital media and the best strategies for building your presence.

The Next Generation

There are a number of classes offered at UCF in which students can learn and practice how to best communicate science. In this episode we speak to a group of students who completed one such course to get their opinions about why communicating science today is crucial for science to grow.

Work with Us

There are many ways the Office of Research can work with faculty on campus to help them disseminate their work to different audiences. This final episode of the season will outline the different ways research and university communicators in general can help share research news.

A special thanks to the many people who donated their time and expertise to make this series possible.

Kate Mansfield, Biology Associate Professor and Director of UCF Marine Turtle Research Group. Mansfield's research focuses on sea turtle biology, ecology, behavior, management, and conservation. Her work has been covered by press all over the world. Her work has been shared in a variety of ways from academic journals, publications like Scientific American, Entertainment Weekly and Scholastic Books, as well as National Public Radio and television stations.

Deanna Sellnow, Professor and Assistant Director, Department of Communication in the Nicholson School of Communication and Media. Sellnow's research focuses on strategic instructional communication in a variety of contexts including risk, crisis, health, and online settings. She has conducted funded research for the United States Geological Survey, Department of Homeland Security, and Centers for Disease Control and Protection.

Tim Sellnow, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies, Nicholson School of Communication and Media. Sellnow's research focuses on bioterrorism, pre-crisis planning, and strategic communication for risk management and mitigation in organizational and health settings. He has conducted funded research for the Department of Homeland Security, the United States Department of Agriculture, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the United States Geological Survey. He has also served in an advisory role for the National Academy of Sciences and the World Health Organization.

Jamie Holmes, anchor and reporter for ABC affiliate WFTV in Orlando.

Holmes is an anchor and reporter who specializes in technology and business news. Before joining WFTV he worked at various television stations in Atlanta, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Florida. He has covered everything from bomb scares and shootings to anthrax scares and presidential elections.

Pamela Wisniewski, assistant professor of Computer Science.

Wisniewski studies the intersection of technology and human interaction, including looking at the online tools that teens and children use. Her work has been covered by dozens of local and national outlets often delivering news that go counter to some long-held beliefs among parents and other stakeholders.

Linda Walters, Pegasus Professor of Biology. Walters has been conducting research in the Indian River Lagoon for more than a decade. Her focus has been on conservation and restoration. She coordinates more than 100 citizen scientists to collect data each year and to make oyster mats to help clean the lagoon. She had worked with dozens of reporters, funding agencies, book publishing company and has even had government agencies declare a Linda Walters Day in recognition of her work.

Phil Metzger, planetary scientist with the Florida Space Institute at the University of Central Florida. Metzger has been interviewed by local and national news outlets from around the world and has a thriving Twitter following. One of his latest collaborations is working with Netflix on a documentary.

Robert Wells, science writer and media coordinator for the Office of Research. Wells has a doctorate in science communication and 15 years of experience in higher education media relations and communicating university research.

Rachel Wimmer, former science writer for the Office of Research. Wimmer is seeking her master's degree in conservation science with a focus on science communications at UCF. She created the podcast series while working in the Office of Research in Spring 2019.

Zenaida Gonzalez Kotala, director of communications for the Office of Research. Kotala worked as a newspaper reporter for 12 years and in university communications for another 12 years.