

SciComm to the Rescue

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The communication landscape continues to offer new opportunities to present science to technical audiences and the general public. Science literacy and communication instruction often occurs in the context of assignments tasking students with communicating scientific findings to other experts in the field through research articles, posters, or oral presentations. However, it's important to also provide broadly-oriented science communication assignments, where students communicate scientific findings to non-expert audiences through various outlets including blogs, social media publications, and news outlets. This talk will discuss the SciComm Scholars Institute (SSI), an integrative faculty development program established to provide faculty with the knowledge, skills, and support to use a broadly-oriented science communication project (referred to as the SciComm UnEssay) to improve students' science literacy and communication. This work is part of the NSF-funded project, "Using Science Communication Instruction to Improve Undergraduate Science Literacy Skills." The work is grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which posits that meeting learners' psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness can positively impact their intrinsic motivation and psychological wellness, leading to increased engagement, academic achievement, and long-term retention of skills and knowledge. SSI may serve as a model for other institutions to enhance science literacy skills and improve STEM education across a range of disciplines.