

# WCRP OPEN SCIENCE CONFERENCE

## CLIMATE RESEARCH IN SERVICE TO SOCIETY

24–28 October 2011, Denver, Colorado, USA  
conference2011.wcrp-climate.org



### **OSC ESC luncheon – Communicating Climate Science to the Media and Public**

#### *Panelists:*

Alexandra Witze

*Contributing editor, Science News*

Patrick Luganda

*Chair Network Climate Journalists in the Greater Horn of Africa (NECJOGHA)*

Andrew Freedman

*Managing Editor of Online Content and Climate Policy Analyst*

Professor Dave Griggs

*CEO ClimateWorks Australia & Director Monash Sustainability Institute*

#### *Moderator:*

Matt Hirschland – Director of UCAR Communications,

This event, sponsored by the American Meteorological Society (AMS), took place at lunchtime on Wednesday of the WCRP Open Science Conference. A panel of professional experts in communicating science presented their views and advice, followed by a question and answer period. An estimated 150 early career scientists (ECS) attended.

Introductory remarks were made by Dr Xueban Zeng, U Arizona, representing the AMS that sponsored the event – Dr Zeng reported that there was good news for ECS – AMS was

reducing page charges; he encouraged all ECS to join AMS because it serves as a platform to contribute to community.

*As an introduction, the panelist gave their views on the current media landscape vis a vis communicating climate science:*

- There are now tremendous opportunities for ECSs to take major role in communicating online; or cultivating relationships with reporters to become a trusted source to interpret your work or that of others.
- Number of mainstream journalists has dropped which may be bad for journalists, but has opened up new opportunities for for scientists in the form of blogs and alternative reporting
- If you as scientist want to get your message out, it is an unparalleled time for using the internet. Many articles even in the New York Times are influenced by a blog.
- Climate scientists assume that people are listening, however, just getting info out is not going to change people's minds.
- Journalism is about stories – people, societal relevance – and we must become better story-tellers.

*Many good pieces of advice and lessons learned were shared:*

- When talking to media, scientists should lead with what they know, what they are sure about, and not the uncertainties; from journalists' perspective – you are burying your lead if you fail to do this; don't bury uncertainties, but structure info differently.
- Identify which media outlets, decision makers, are receptive to your message and work with them and develop long-term relationships, not just transactional ones.
- Many universities and institutions have communications officers who can help you navigate this field, prepare yourself and your messages.
- Many media/communications training opportunities exist – call university public affairs office – AGU; many fellowships e.g., AAAS mass media fellowship; Stanford programme; NSF; congressional fellowships
- Great communicators are not born, they are created. Becoming great is an investment in you and your science.
- Lot of bad news around; better to go for good news.
- It is our (scientists') responsibility to help journalist learn about climate and there is an appetite to learn – we need to organize ourselves to do that training.
- Step up to the plate; we need you; understand there is a reward for talking to journalist and communicating as a means to sharing the impact of your work.
- There is an institutional inertia that does not always adequately recognize this contribution and this must change.
- If a journalists calls you – you are not having a conversation; be certain about your message. It is ok to ask for a few minutes, organize your thoughts and ring him/her back.

- Read a lot – blogs, history; business publications to get perspective on this climate debate – how it fits in the larger context of societal and economic discussions and realities.
- Learn from those who are good at communicating.
- Learn basic rules of journalism.
- Scientists must learn when to stop talking; be prepared; communicate clearly.