

Book review

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION: AN INTRODUCTION

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This book is the first volume in a proposed series dealing with the communication of and about science. The series' authors and editors were taken from an array of academic fields to write to an academic audience. The breadth of cultural and professional diversity in the volume's creators is clearly evident. The chapter authors are drawn from a variety of scientific disciplines, cultural backgrounds and academic institutions, although they are predominantly European. The editor-in-chief of the series Hans Peter Peters is German, the volume's editors are from The Netherlands and the UK, while the three writers of the book's foreword were drawn from institutions in Mexico, South Africa and China.

This volume, volume 1, is an introductory book. It centres on key theoretical issues offering evidence-based cases and presenting science communication as a social and cultural phenomenon with varied stakeholders, in addition to delving into the public's expectations of science and technology. Its aim is to introduce the subject of science communication to academics who are familiar with and those who are unfamiliar with the discipline.

The book is comprised of two forewords: one by the series' editor-in-chief and one by this volume's editors. There are 10 stand-alone chapters, each submitted by different authors (single or multiple) on isolated subjects. All chapters are intended to introduce and discuss topics in relation to science communication. Thus, the book is a collection of papers for academics. The chapters are: Setting the Scene, Views of Science, The Process of Communication Science, Science in Dialogue, Informal Science Education, Science Journalism, Risk Communication, Health Communication, Environmental Communication, and Research in Science Communication; collectively a somewhat comprehensive introduction. The 10 chapters average 26 pages in length with all being fully referenced. There is a contents page, but no index, because each chapter stands alone. Each chapter is presented with an introduction and conclusion in an attempt at uniformity through the volume.

The volume's focus on introducing the subject of scientific communication by giving a broad introductory background is appropriate for its academic audience, particularly as it is acting

as a primer to the series. Yet, it is not exclusively targeted to beginners, its inherent breadth will surely inform many already familiar within the field.

The strength of this book lies in its targeting of learners and introducing an extremely broad discipline. I find this same strength to be its greatest weakness as the subject shifts from *this* to *that* and not linearly building a narrative. Stand-alone chapters do not entice me to take it to bed (unless I am interested in a particular chapter). Yet, this text must surely aid the discipline by providing a primer to explain how the many and varied sub-disciplines are engaging with science and its communication, and how these all interact with the various cultures. The area is vast so no doubt this volume, and the series, on scientific communication, are needed as academic starting points in any attempt to amalgamate the varied spectrum into a coherent discipline. As a volume that aims to introduce a field to academics, both familiar and unfamiliar with science communication as a discipline, it is successful.

The organisation of the text into chapters that are stand-alone papers was disappointing to me; I had wanted to read my way through in a narrative explained by a single author. However, there are too many twists and turns when thinking about so many scientific disciplines and cultures that a single narrative from a single author could never cover the same amount of ground. In direct contrast to the previous book I reviewed on scientific writing, which had a single narrative and no references, this book with different subject chapters, all being fully referenced, left me feeling like I was getting a more rounded and less authoritarian approach. I was benefitting from more authors and opinions even though each chapter represents only a single point on a long and varied spectrum.

The writing style throughout is academic, which is to say the writing is variable coming from different individuals, not entertaining, but in a clear and concise academic style. There is little in the way of supplementary material; the occasional photograph and a few pictorial flowcharts reproduced on matt paper are mostly uninspiring. The cover design is an artsy representation of a molecular structure, I think.

I do not often look for science communication on this broad a scale. Nonetheless, I would recommend this book to students, researchers and practitioners of science communication. It may also serve as an introduction for science policy makers and for those looking for deeper insights into the wide spectrum of the discipline.

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