

Parallel Session 11: PCST network: an added value for science communication training?

TRAINING SCIENCE COMMUNICATORS IN COLOMBIA

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Text

The need Science Communicators

Human beings have created many different ways to transmit knowledge: Since philosophical discussions at Greek public squares, formal and informal educational activities, until mass communication media, and modern information and communication technologies (ICT), like virtual spaces and the cyberspace.

Currently, science popularizers are professionals with some special characteristics and lots of alternatives to perform on diverse communicative activities, as they may have been trained either in social or natural science.

Transmission and appropriation of science journalism and science concepts need a professional training process that allow students, journalists and researchers to understand all the possible scenarios derived from scientific activities and their implications on social, economic and legal aspects. This training will result in the adequate transmission of science, which means accurate and easy to understand.

That is why it is necessary to train communicators and journalists convinced that society has the right to access to this information and therefore higher its levels of education. Those society professionals will be able to appropriate scientific knowledge, to transmit this information and build real communication channels with the citizens.

Like other countries in Latin America and around the world, Colombia does not have science communicators nor specialized journalists trained in this specialty. There is a lack of normativity by public institutions that rule the educative policies of the country. Universities do not promote the implementation of this kind of programs. Furthermore, mass media do not require journalists, specialized in this area.

acpc trains Science Communicators

The Colombian Association of Science Journalism – acpc - is one of the oldest in Latin America. Since the beginning this Association has promoted the training of Colombian science journalists, gaining national and international recognition. How can we train idoneous science communicators? what kind of abilities should these professionals have in order to transmit citizens the knowledge produced by

researchers? How can we attract the attention of citizens in order to obtain more knowledge? These are some questions we are trying to solve by organizing activities with universities and mass media. For this purpose acpc has as one of its main lines of activities, to train science journalists.

Since 1996 its members have designed and organized seminars, conferences, workshops and courses addressed to faculty, researchers and journalism students. According to the different audiences, we design the appropriate course. For eight years we have done it permanently getting excellent results.

Conquering Spaces

Five universities with Social Communication Departments have hired members of acpc to offer science journalist courses. Since 1998 we have trained 543 science journalism courses. As a result of acpc experience at those universities since 2000 we offer some of the students the opportunity of doing an internship at our offices.

11 students have been trained at acpc. Nine of them did their internships at Noticyt, the Colombian Science and Technology news wire service, that started January 2003. One of them is working in the communication area of an important national research center, Cenipalma, and another two remain working at Noticyt .

Acpc has organized 18 courses in 14 cities, 15 universities, 5 research centers and 6 media institutions, reaching more than 3500 people from Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico.

The scientific community has been receptive to our call and have proposed programs to train researches on the dissemination of their research projects.

In order to be able to do that members of the Association are permanently trained.

As a result of many years of research and preparation of academic material, we have organized several conferences on specific topics that we are constantly adapting with new events.

This is how the acpc has developed a valuable approach to democratize scientific knowledge. This was one of the reasons why the acpc won on 2002 the Award Scientific Merit under the category of Popularization of Science, given by the Colombian Association for the Advancement of Science.

