Meeting times:
Thursdays, Aug 31, Sept 7, 14, 21, 28; 2:30-5:20pm, 1 credit. Melville Library, Room N4072

Instructors:
Roxanne Khamsi, roxanne.khamsi@stonybrook.edu, cell: 646-251-5611
Kathleen Ehm, PhD, kathleen.ehm@stonybrook.edu, office: 631-632-7531

Office hours:
Roxanne Khamsi: Melville N4029 (Alda Center office), by appointment on Thursdays
Kathleen Ehm: Computer Science 2309, office hours by appointment

I. Course Description

JRN 501, Distilling Your Message, aims to help graduate students in science, engineering, math and health disciplines learn to speak clearly and vividly about science in ways a lay audience can understand and appreciate. The course will focus on helping you communicate differently to different kinds of audiences in different formats. We will meet in Melville Library, Room N4072. The fourth class will be held at 4-6:50 pm in the TV studios in the ECC (Educational Communications Center), located between Javits and the Psychology building. This course requires active participation by all students, not only as speakers and writers, but as listeners, editors and constructive critics.

II. Reading and Assignments

Required reading and assignments will be posted on Blackboard or distributed as handouts. No textbook is used. Additional optional readings and other resources will be posted on Blackboard.


III. Grades
If you come to class, do the assignments on time, participate, and make an effort, you are likely to get an A.

**IV. Attendance**
Because this is a five-session course and emphasizes work done in class, rather than homework, it is particularly important that you come to class. If you miss two or more classes, you should withdraw from the course to avoid getting an F. Other situations will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. If circumstances prevent your attending class, the instructor must be informed by phone or email on or before the day of class or within 24 hours afterward. Arrangements should be made with the instructor to make up the missed material.

**V. Miscellaneous**

**E-mail:** All university email communications use your primary campus address ([firstname.lastname@stonybrook.edu](mailto:firstname.lastname@stonybrook.edu)). If you are not using that address, you will not receive any university email, including Blackboard.

**Blackboard:** There is a Blackboard account for this course. Check daily for announcements. Failure to check e-mail will not be accepted as an excuse for missing announcements or assignment changes. If you have not done so already, you must set up a Blackboard account. Please verify your email address on Blackboard. For help, call 631-632-9602.

**Academic Integrity:** Any form of fabrication, plagiarism, cheating or other ethical offense will be reported to the Academic Judiciary Committee and can result in a failing grade for the course, dismissal from the journalism program or expulsion from the university.

Here is the University’s statement on academic dishonesty:
“Plagiarism is the use of others’ words and/or ideas without clearly acknowledging their source. As students, you are learning about other people’s ideas in your course texts, your instructors’ lectures, in-class discussions, and when doing your own research. When you incorporate those words and ideas into your own work, it is of the utmost importance that you give credit where it is due. Plagiarism, intentional or unintentional, is considered academic dishonesty and all instances will be reported to the Academic Judiciary. To avoid plagiarism, you must give the original author credit whenever you use another person’s ideas, opinions, drawings, or theories as well as any facts or any other pieces of information that are not common knowledge. Additionally quotations of another person’s actual spoken or written words; or a close paraphrasing of another person’s spoken or written words must also be referenced. Accurately citing all sources and putting direct quotations – of even a few key words – in quotation marks are required.”

For further information on academic integrity and the policies regarding academic dishonesty, go to Academic Judiciary at [www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary](http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary)

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC
(Educational Communications Center) Building, Room 128, (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations, if any, are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. 

**Disruptive Behavior:** “Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty members are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn.”

**JRN: 501 Distilling Your Message**

**Class Schedule**

*Assignment for Class 1: Read posted material about clear communication. Be prepared to tell a stranger, in one minute, about your scientific work (or a scientific issue you’ve studied) and why it matters. (Full assignment is posted on Blackboard.)*

**Class 1, August 31: Distilling Overview**

Lecture/discussion: Distilling Your Message
- Introductions and overview of course
- Basics of clearly communicating about science without dumbing it down
- Group activity – avoiding jargon

*Break – 10 min*

Break-out Groups:
- Practice making a short, clear, conversational statement about your scientific work (or a scientific issue you’ve studied) in a way that will interest and engage a non-scientist.
- Discuss assignment for next class

*Assignment for Class 2:*

- Watch before-and-after videos posted on Blackboard.
- Prepare a two-minute talk for 1) a high school career day, and 2) for your choice from our list of audiences. (Full assignment will be posted on Blackboard.)
- Write a short bio of yourself, 200-300 words long. Please email it to the instructors by **9am Tuesday, September 5th.** (Full assignment will be posted on Blackboard.)

- Also, if you have an abstract of a poster or paper you’ve worked on, please email it to the instructors by **4 pm September 1st.** If you don’t have one, don’t worry.

**Class 2, September 7th: Knowing Your Audience and Connecting**
Lecture/discussion: Knowing Your Audience

- Science-speak and jargon in science – video examples
- Know your audience and know your purpose
  - Different types of audiences
  - Different goals/messages - education, funding, job, etc.

Group activity: Distilling an abstract

Lecture/discussion: Introduction to storytelling

Break – 10 min

Break-out Groups:
- Practice talking to different audiences.

Assignment for Class 3:
- Read, watch Blackboard postings on storytelling.
- Come prepared to tell us a story (3 minutes or less) about a turning point in your life or your work. Do not write out your story for this assignment. We don’t want you reading your stories – we want you telling them.
- Fill out the storytelling worksheet (posted on Blackboard) and bring it to class to hand in.
- By noon, Monday, September 11th, send a revised version of your short bio of yourself (200-400 words long) and post it on the Blackboard Discussion Board called “Your Bio.” When composing this bio, imagine you are going to appear on a local TV station’s morning show, in a weekly segment called “Talking about Science.” The producers want your bio, to prepare questions and to post on their website to interest potential viewers. Include basic info (such as your name, your field, where you’re from), a brief description of your research or area of interest, and a sentence or two about what you’d like to discuss in the interview. If there is some striking fact or highlight that makes you or your work particularly interesting, be sure to include it. Think about what would engage a morning television audience on Long Island.

Class 3, Sept 14th: Storytelling

Lecture/discussion: Telling a Story

- Why are stories so powerful?
- What makes a story engaging and memorable?
- What’s the point?

Group activity: Tell a story, get a reaction

Lecture/discussion: Preparing for a video interview

Break – 10 min
Break-out Groups
- Practice telling stories
- Discuss assignment for next class

Assignment(s) for Class 4:
- Send the final version of your Bio by noon, Monday, September 18th.
- Optional assignment: Write up the story you told in Class 3 and send it to the instructors for feedback. Please send it by noon, Monday, September 18th. It should be between 300-600 words long.

Class 4, September 21st: Video interviews

*This session will meet 2:30-5:20 pm in the TV studios in the ECC (Educational Communications Center), located between Javits and the Psychology building. You will be able to get your interview on an SD card or download for your own use later, so dress accordingly.*

- Students will be interviewed on camera, with feedback and playback.

Assignment for Class 5 (final class):
- Find an article in the media from the week preceding class 5 about science that held your interest and that you think distills its message well for the general public. Post it on the Blackboard Discussion Board called “Science Stories” by noon Wednesday, September 27th.
- Bring your laptop to class, if convenient. We’ll need to have four or five available.

Class 5, September 28th: Putting Your Skills into Practice

Lecture/discussion: Science Outreach and Opportunities
- Types of outreach: Join the conversation
- Ways to hone skills, get recognition
- Science writing in different forums

Group activity: Writing a letter to the editor
- Working in groups, students will write a letter to the editor.
- Feedback and advice on revision

*Break – 10 min.*

Discussion:
- Moving forward (with communicating science)
- Opportunities for outreach (Science Unplugged, and others)
- Evaluations