

ComSciCon at Virginia Tech

Greetings! I'm Allison Hutchison, a PhD candidate in Rhetoric & Writing here at Virginia Tech, and I am working with the Center for Communicating Science to host a local ComSciCon (communicating science conference) in the Spring 2019 semester. Because ComSciCon is a conference organized by and created for graduate students, I'm looking for partners to help with planning, advertising, supporting, and running the conference. If you are interested, please reach out to me at abhutch@vt.edu.

Tentative Conference Outline

Thursday, March 7, 2019	Kickoff & Keynote Address	6:30 PM	GLC Auditorium
Friday, March 8, 2019	Opening & Breakfast	8:30-9:30 AM	GLC Multipurpose Room
	Breakout Sessions	9:30-11:30	GLC Meeting Rooms
	Lunch & Meet-and-Greet	12 - 1 PM	GLC Multipurpose Room
	Afternoon Sessions	1:30 - 3:30	GLC Meeting Rooms
	Reception & Pop Talks	4:00 - 6:00	GLC Multipurpose Room

ComSciCon-local Statement of Purpose

Short version

ComSciCon-local workshops are intended to provide exceptional professional development services to their graduate student attendees which will empower young scientists to better communicate with experts outside of their own fields and with the general public. Workshops emphasize training in science writing and web and multimedia communication through a combination of interactive discussion with professional communicators and hands-on practice sessions. Moreover, graduate students engaged in conference organization strongly develop collaboration and leadership skills valuable in both communication and research applications. They also have the opportunity to network with current and future leaders in science communication.

Long version

Why

Scientists have a mandate to be clear and effective communicators in order to teach and share methods with students and colleagues, to convince other scientists of the veracity of their findings, and to perpetuate and grow public support for their work. However, traditional specialized training programs in scientific and technical programs, graduate degree programs, typically do not include any coursework or other requirements focused on communication. While science outreach initiatives can provide excellent training and experiential opportunities in communication, particularly when student-led, these are not well established at every institution.

Communicating Science (ComSciCon) ComSciCon-local workshops are intended to provide exceptional professional development services to their graduate student attendees, to empower young scientists to better communicate with experts outside of their own fields and with the general public.

Who

ComSciCon programming focuses on graduate students pursuing degrees in STEM fields, where the communication of complex and technical concepts is integral to their academic achievement and future careers. Graduate school is the phase of a scientist's education when professional development training in communication can have the largest impact, both in their immediate work and enduring throughout their career. Graduate students have the technical expertise to interpret scholarly research at the highest level, the temporal connection with earlier academic stages to interact easily with young audiences as well as adults and professionals, and the flexibility to aggressively pursue new initiatives. Both graduate student attendees and organizers greatly benefit from the professional development opportunities ComSciCon provides.

ComSciCon-local programs are intimately tied to their host communities, organized by graduate students at local universities and with graduate student attendees and invited experts, professional science communicators, sourced from the community. ComSciCon programming is inclusive of all fields of science, engineering, technology, math, and other technical fields, and of students seeking careers in research as well as applied fields such as teaching, journalism, policy, and industry.

What

Workshops emphasize training in science writing and web and multimedia communication through a combination of interactive discussion with professional communicators and hands-on practice sessions. The core programming of ComSciCon workshops are panel discussion with invited professionals focused on fundamental and diverse aspects of science communication, writing sessions focused on engaging forms of expression as well as mechanics and audience, editing sessions where attendees can receive feedback and interact with both peers and invited experts, and opportunities for graduate students to develop new communication collaborations and initiatives.

Where

ComSciCon-local workshops may be held wherever a critical mass of interested graduate students, aspiring ambassadors for the communication of research in their fields, exist. The first ComSciCon-local workshop was held in Cambridge MA in January 2014, serving the graduate student communities of Harvard University and MIT.

When

ComSciCon-local workshops can be held as frequently as is necessary to provide the universities in their host communities with professional development opportunities to each generation of their graduate students, serving a new population of attendees each time. In many communities, an annual workshop may suffice to meet the demand among aspiring scientist-communicators; in other communities, more or less frequent workshops may be needed.

How

ComSciCon-local workshops are organized for graduate students, by graduate students, with the support of University offices and departments and other institutions in the local community. Because they rely on and emphasize local resources, including invited speakers and venues, and because they are operated by volunteer student organizers, the workshops are highly cost efficient. Graduate students engaged in conference organization strongly develop collaboration and leadership skills valuable in both communication and research applications. They also have the opportunity to network with current and future leaders in science communication.