The Real Challenges of Reducing Carbon Emissions

On the heels of the international Paris Agreement on climate change, the pressure is on to limit global warming to 1.5°C by 2100 and the power sector will play a critical role. While U.S. policy is stalled at the federal level, states, non-profits, and the private sector are pushing ahead. Metcalf’s seminar for journalists, Power Sector in the Hot Seat, in partnership with the Society of Environmental Journalists at their annual conference this September, will explore new business models, technologies, and policies to cap carbon emissions, expand renewable energy, and increase efficiency.

Engaging Public Audiences on the Mysteries of Life Below the Seafloor

Metcalf will offer a science communication workshop in October for researchers who study one of Earth’s greatest mysteries: what lies beneath the seafloor. In partnership with Center for Dark Energy Biosphere Investigations, Building Leadership in Science Communication will give researchers basic tools to use when talking about their research with the news media and other public audiences and feature work sessions on writing op-eds and creating short videos for the web.

Directions in Science Communication

Metcalf will host a SciComm Exchange this fall to give scientists in Rhode Island colleges and universities an opportunity to discuss current trends in science communication research.

The mission of Metcalf Institute for Marine & Environmental Reporting is to expand accurate environmental news coverage through innovative training and resources for journalists, researchers, and other science communicators to build a deeper public understanding of science and the environment.
Metcalf Fellows Bring New Stories, Confidence to their Reporting

“My head is alive with ideas,” said freelance reporter Kate Siber as she headed home after an intensive week at Metcalf Institute’s 18th Annual Science Immersion Workshop for Journalists at the URI Graduate School of Oceanography. Siber was one of ten Fellows selected to attend the Metcalf annual workshop, June 5 to June 10.

“Right now I’m just so overwhelmed with gratitude that I had this opportunity,” she added.

The 2016 Fellows were chosen from the largest pool of applicants in the workshop’s history and hailed from a variety of media organizations including Marketplace, WHYY, the Dallas Morning News, NBC News, and the Cape Gazette in Delaware. The group also included journalists from Pakistan and Nigeria.

“I now know how to interpret the science for my publication and actually tell audiences the stories they need to hear,” said Doyin Adeoye, reporter for the Nigerian Tribune. “I’m ready to take environment reporting in Africa to a new level.”

The Fellows learned about coastal environmental science first-hand, learning how researchers conduct field surveys to monitor changing fisheries in Narragansett Bay; observing effects of sea level rise on a salt marsh; and discussing a range of water quality management issues facing urban and coastal communities.

Metcalf’s signature sessions on science translation gave Fellows tips on finding the relevance in science journal articles for their audiences, while participating scientists learned how to identify and pitch newsworthy research to journalists.

The Fellows are now back on their beats, putting their new insights to work in stories on flooding, water quality, warming seas and fisheries.

“I feel like I’m going back home with a great foundation for reporting on the environment, and I feel a great deal of confidence that I didn’t feel before,” said Jeff Mosier, reporter for the Dallas Morning News. “It was one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life.”

Writing for Influential Audiences

Technical writing is essential for scientists but writing for non-experts requires a concise and jargon-free approach. Metcalf hosted a workshop in July to help Rhode Island scientists build the skills and confidence to write effectively for public audiences. Experts provided guidance on translating complex scientific information into short narratives and framing messages for the news media.

What Does it Mean to Be Certain?

Scientists seek answers by reducing uncertainty through repeated observation and experimentation. Scientific uncertainty is an inherent aspect of complex environmental and public health issues and challenging to communicate. In an Environmental Law Institute webinar and workshop in April, Metcalf’s executive director, Sunshine Menezes, presented perspectives on uncertainty and what makes it so difficult to express.

URI Celebrates R/V Endeavor

Since its christening 40 years ago, the URI Graduate School of Oceanography’s research vessel Endeavor has carried scientists, students and teachers across the world’s oceans to conduct research. On September 8th, it was the public’s turn to board the ship. GSO hosted nearly 4000 people for free tours of the vessel with science displays in nearby tents, including a touch tank for children and presentations on everything from zooplankton and sharks to hurricanes and deep-sea ocean exploration.

Best Seat in the House

Did you miss Metcalf’s public lectures in June at the URI Graduate School of Oceanography? Now you can watch the lectures from home on Metcalf’s YouTube channel (youtube.com/metcalfinstitute). Hear from Curt Guyette, the Michigan reporter who broke the Flint water crisis story, get the update on federal flooding policy from Samantha Medlock, discover how our oceans might be affected by reductions in carbon emissions, and much more.

“Scientists make amazing discoveries about our world, many of them newsworthy and some, like global warming, requiring urgent attention. The scientific method is by nature utterly thorough, depending on careful, prolonged analysis and painstaking proof. The media plays a critical role in reporting and explaining science and the implications of research to a general public that can become easily confused by the intricacies and rigor of the scientific process. Even the vocabulary needs to be translated to language we can understand. Metcalf provides an essential, vibrant bridge for science and the media, cultivating a sustainable ecosystem for these two professions to collaborate and promote solutions.”

Sarah Finnie Robinson
Founding Partner, WeSpin
Metcalf Institute Advisory Board