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#### **LETTER FROM THE CHAIRPERSON**

It is my great pleasure to extend heartfelt greetings to the readers of the 2019 second issue of the Postgraduate Forum Newsletter. We are pleased to inform members that we are now registered with the Department of Social Development as an NGO!

We are committed to creating an enabling environment for postgraduate students and their supervisors. We aim to offer workshops on research skill training and supervision. Our workshops place emphasis on developing students' research skills and enhancing the quality of their research in order to help postgraduate students and supervisors to become ethical researchers who produce quality research.

We are in the process of initiating collaborations and developing formalised relationships with various institutions/organisations by way of activities, such as workshops, seminars and partnerships, to promote the academic activities of the PGFSA. The Forum is organizing a supervision

workshop scheduled for October 25th in East London at the new UFH, UNISA and WSU Collaborative Library. Please plan to attend, or encourage and support emerging researchers to attend.

Activities on the agenda for this year include: reviewing the constitution and distributing it to members at the next AGM for comment and acceptance, developing a membership drive plan, and revising the current mailing list. This would also include clarifying the benefits of membership. Our marketing drive to promote the activities of the PGFSA is to be expanded, for example, by developing a Facebook account for easy access.

Best Regards,  
Mamadi Matlhako

#### **FOCUS ON SCIENCE COMMUNICATION**

Science communication is a fast-growing area that is increasingly being recognised in higher education institutions. It is defined as 'communication that reaches audiences outside academic circles, aiming to make [research] relevant, accessible and

meaningful to people who are not experts in a specific field' (Joubert & Guenther, 2019). Arguably, conveying one's research findings to the public is as important as sharing them with one's academic peers.

Information on some of the many entertaining platforms for science communication that have arisen over recent years follows below.

### **INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FOR RESEARCHERS**

Public engagement for researchers has recently become a focus topic in international research and PhD communities. It entails mutual learning between scientists and lay people through meaningful interactions that aim to promote not only learning, but also exposure to new perspectives and views. Through engagement, dialogue and the exchange of ideas, scientists and the public should have interactive opportunities, not only to educate society at large, but also to find ways for researchers to make their work more relevant. The recent adoption of the White Paper on Science, Technology and Innovation (March 2019) confirms the South African government's commitment to science communication.

In addition to the drive by the government to create opportunities for engagement, researchers are expected to share their research with relevant communities. This can be done during hands-on sessions with stakeholders, but often the most effective way to disseminate science is through a well-planned communication strategy.

Social media-savvy researchers use platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and even YouTube to share their research on an ongoing basis. This involves sharing short snippets on findings to a community of like-minded researchers and practitioners. However, this does not necessarily lead to widespread exposure to larger audiences, important audiences (like local and national government), or policy makers. For this reason, researchers aiming to disseminate their research to a wider audience should look towards more mainstream and mass media. Working together with journalists who are researching a particular topic for television or print media represents just one option. Another could be to pitch ideas about research that has become topical to industry publications, newspapers and news programmes. Public events like TED Talks offer researchers the

opportunity to speak in front of large audiences. With the proliferation of open science, researchers may choose to make their research available publically through publishing in open-source journals and books, so that their science is accessible for a large audience, whether fellow academics or the general public.

Most researchers who share their research pro-actively and engage public audiences report that they find these activities rewarding and worthwhile, and that they benefit – often in unexpected ways – from the public input. However, some researchers find public engagement and sharing their research difficult and lack the skills and confidence to do so, while others feel that time spent on disseminating their science takes away time and focus from their research. Consequently, there is a need to raise awareness of the value of research communication.

Public engagement skills training should be provided to emerging researchers. Making a public engagement strategy part of the PhD from the start will help new PhD candidates to structure their message as their research progresses and in the long run, help them to overcome the hurdles many researchers

associate with setting up a science communication strategy.

## **FAMELAB**

FameLab is an international initiative. Driven by the British Council, it is purported to be one of the biggest science communication competitions in the world, with more than 30 countries taking part annually. FameLab contestants are required to captivate the judges and lay audience with a three-minute scientific talk and are judged according to content, clarity and charisma.

Since 2013, various South African higher education institutions and centres have been participating in FameLab training and heats and have fared well. In 2017, Tshiamo Legoale from Mintek, was the international winner! This year, Keneilwe Moropa, from the CSIR and TUT, won South Africa's National FameLab heat and represented South Africa in the International FameLab competition, at the Cheltenham Festival in the UK, and took runner up! If you are interested in finding out about the next round of SA FameLab training and heats, contact the British council, SA at [famelab@britishcouncil.org.za](mailto:famelab@britishcouncil.org.za).

## **SCIENCE COMMUNICATION FROM A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE**

I had not really heard of science communication before, but in 2016, my doctoral supervisor asked me to enter UJ's 3-Minute Thesis competition. I had to sum up my doctoral thesis in just three minutes, using only non-scientific language and one static PowerPoint slide. The difficulty came when trying to find a balance between not speaking in the usual laboratory-language, but also not dumbing down the research work, because although the audience were not scientists, they were still intelligent adults. This competition really allows you to find the story in your research and helps you to answer when people ask you: 'so what do you do?'

I then entered the FameLab competition in 2017. It is an international competition where you condense your Master's or doctoral studies into 3 minutes. No slides can be used, but you may use props and it's more of a performance. I was chosen to be one of the 20 national semi-finalists. Before the semi-finals, we all met in Johannesburg for a Masterclass on the FameLab competition. With projects ranging from engineering, mining, spacecraft materials, brain

chemistry, animal feed and ancient plants, we all had the same passion and it showed! We went there as competitors but left as friends.

Competitions like these give you the confidence to speak to people from all walks of life about your work. It is a wonderful feeling to help people understand the science that affects their lives. Worldwide, scientists seem to understand that it is no longer acceptable to only produce wonderful research and keep it within our small communities – we must get down from our ivory towers and disseminate the knowledge to everyone.

Clarissa van der Loo  
(Doctoral Candidate,  
University of  
Johannesburg).

## **FURTHER READING**

TED Talks – [Read more](#)  
FameLab – [Read more](#)  
3MT – [Read more](#)

Baron, N. 2013. *Escape from the Ivory Tower*. Washington DC: Island Press.

Bucchi, M. & Trench, B. 2014. *Handbook of public communication of science and technology*. London: Routledge.0

Department of Science and Technology. (2019.) *White Paper on Science, Technology and Innovation*

enabling inclusive and sustainable South African Development in a changing world. Available [here](#).

Olson, R. 2009. Don't be such a scientist. Washington D.C.: Island Press.

See also: Science and Cocktails; Science Cafés; Pint of Science; Soapbox Science; Social Media for Scientists; Social Media Snakes & Ladders; Play Decide; Citizen Science; and Dance Your PhD as other examples of science communication platforms.

### TRAINING OPTIONS

There are some options currently available to SA institutions in terms of training in scicomm for staff and postgraduate student capacity development. We list a few in the following paragraphs:

The [African Doctoral Academy](#) is offering a Science Communication

course at its coming Spring School: Packing a science communication toolbox for your PhD journey from 15 – 16 October 2019 in Stellenbosch. It will be presented by Senior Science Communication researcher and lecturer, Dr Marina Joubert. [Read more](#).

Alternatively, one can enrol for a CREST Science Communication [online course](#) also presented by Dr Joubert's team (next dates TBC).

In addition, a company called Jive Media Africa, also offers excellent scicomm training options.

A number of MPhil programmes in the field are also offered locally and internationally. Here is a local example:

#### Science and Technology Studies – CREST

The table below sums up, at a glance, the three science communication competitions that are featured currently at some South African universities.

### NEWS

#### *NRF call*

Please note the NRF call for Knowledge, Interchange and Collaboration (KIC) grants. The second call is for travel/events taking place between 1 Jan to 30 June 2020, and the application deadline is 30 August 2019. The call details are on this [link](#).

#### *Canon Collins Trust Scholarships call*

Canon Collins Trust have recently opened a scholarship programme for change makers and social activists – exceptional individuals committed to change. The scholarship is for exceptional scholars from southern Africa to study in South Africa. Later in the year, they will release their UK scholarships as they fund scholarships at 30 universities across SA and the UK. Closing date for applications is 19 August 2019. Read more [here](#).

Research Communication Competitions			
	FameLab	3-minute Thesis	Visualize your Thesis
Eligibility	Master's and PhD with a focus on STEM fields	Doctoral candidates	Research Master's students and PhD candidates
Time	3 minutes	3 minutes	1 minute
Media	Oral plus props	Oral with static slide	Video presentation