

Academia's Emerging Crisis of Relevance *and the* Emergent Role of the Engaged Scholar



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SCHOOL OF NATURAL RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT
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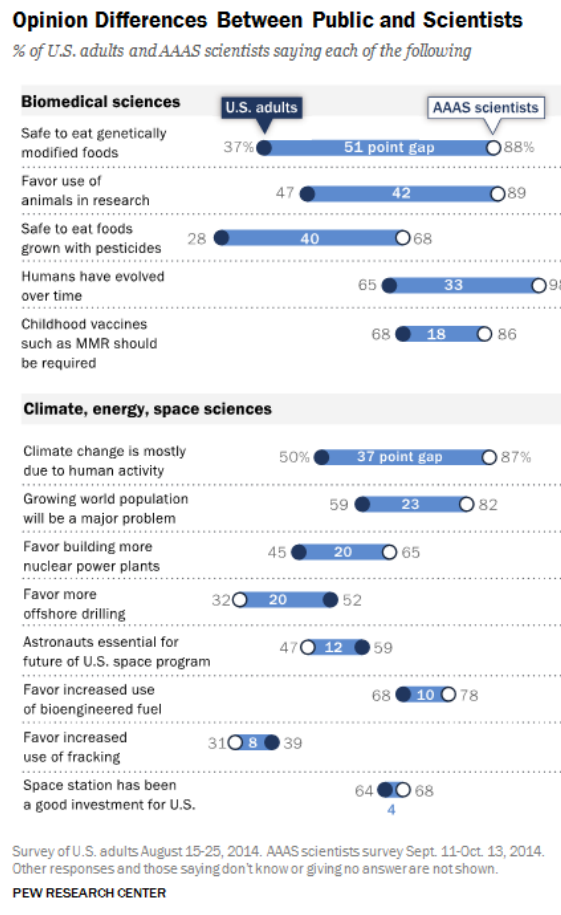
 @HoffmanAndy

- ✓ **Why Should Academics Engage in Public and Political Discourse?**
- ✓ **What are the Rules of Engagement?**



✓ Why Should Academics Engage in Public and Political Discourse?

1. The degraded state of public discourse, gap between science and public.



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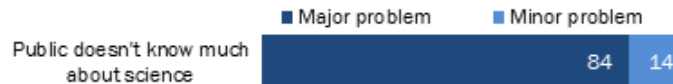


✓ Why Should Academics Engage in Public and Political Discourse?

1. The degraded state of public discourse, gap between science and public.

Scientists' Perspective: Limited Public Knowledge About Science Is a Major Problem

% of AAAS scientists saying... is a major or minor problem for science in general



AAAS scientists survey Sept 11-Oct 13, 2014. Q5d. Those saying this is not a problem or giving no answer are not shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

According to the California Academy of Sciences, the majority of the U.S. public is unable to pass even a basic scientific literacy test (California Academy of Sciences, 2009).

The National Science Foundation reports that two-thirds of Americans do not clearly understand the scientific process (National Science Foundation, 2004)

42 percent of Americans believe God created humans “in their present form 10,000 years ago,” disputing scientific consensus that humanity slowly evolved from primates over millions of years (Gallup, 2014)

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2. The New Context of the Academic Environment

- Social media is changing teaching and research.



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2. The New Context of the Academic Environment

- Social media is changing teaching and research.
- Public antagonism towards science. We are viewed as elites, State legislatures are cutting support.

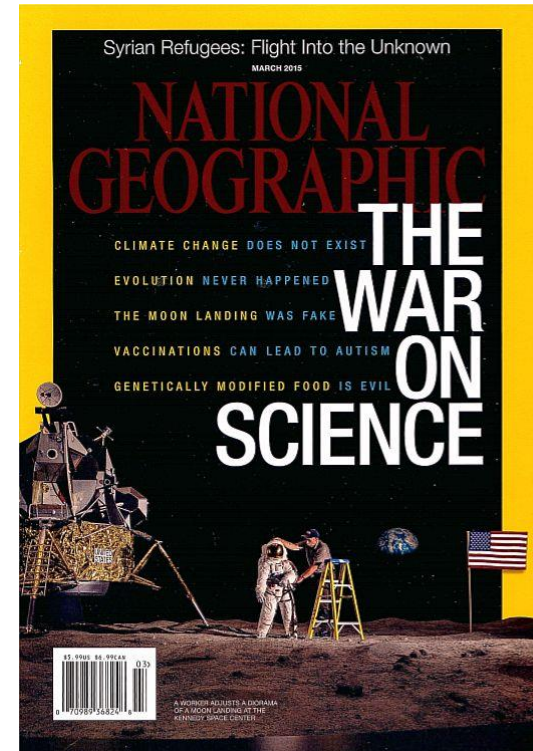
The Washington Post

“Gov. Scott Walker savages Wisconsin public education in new budget”

“N.C. Governor attacks higher ed, Proposes funding colleges by graduates’ jobs”



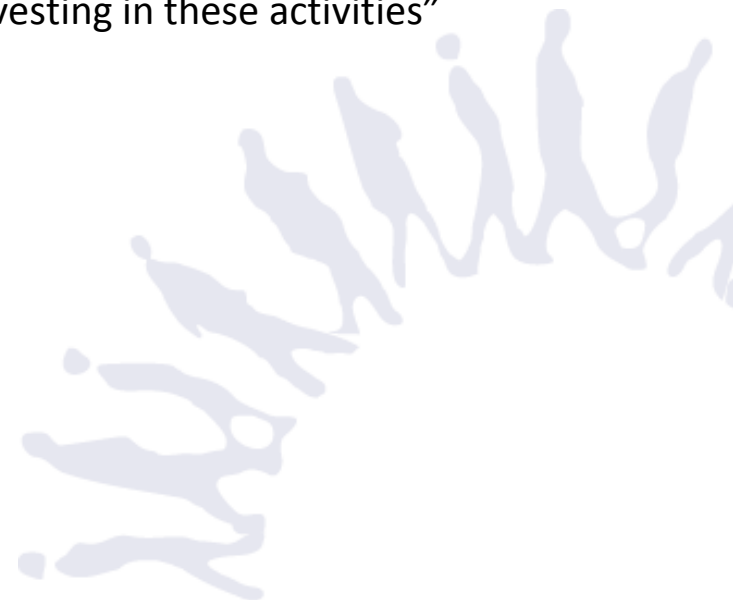
“Florida Set for New Cut in Spending on Colleges”



✓ Why Should Academics Engage in Public and Political Discourse?

3. Changes within Academia

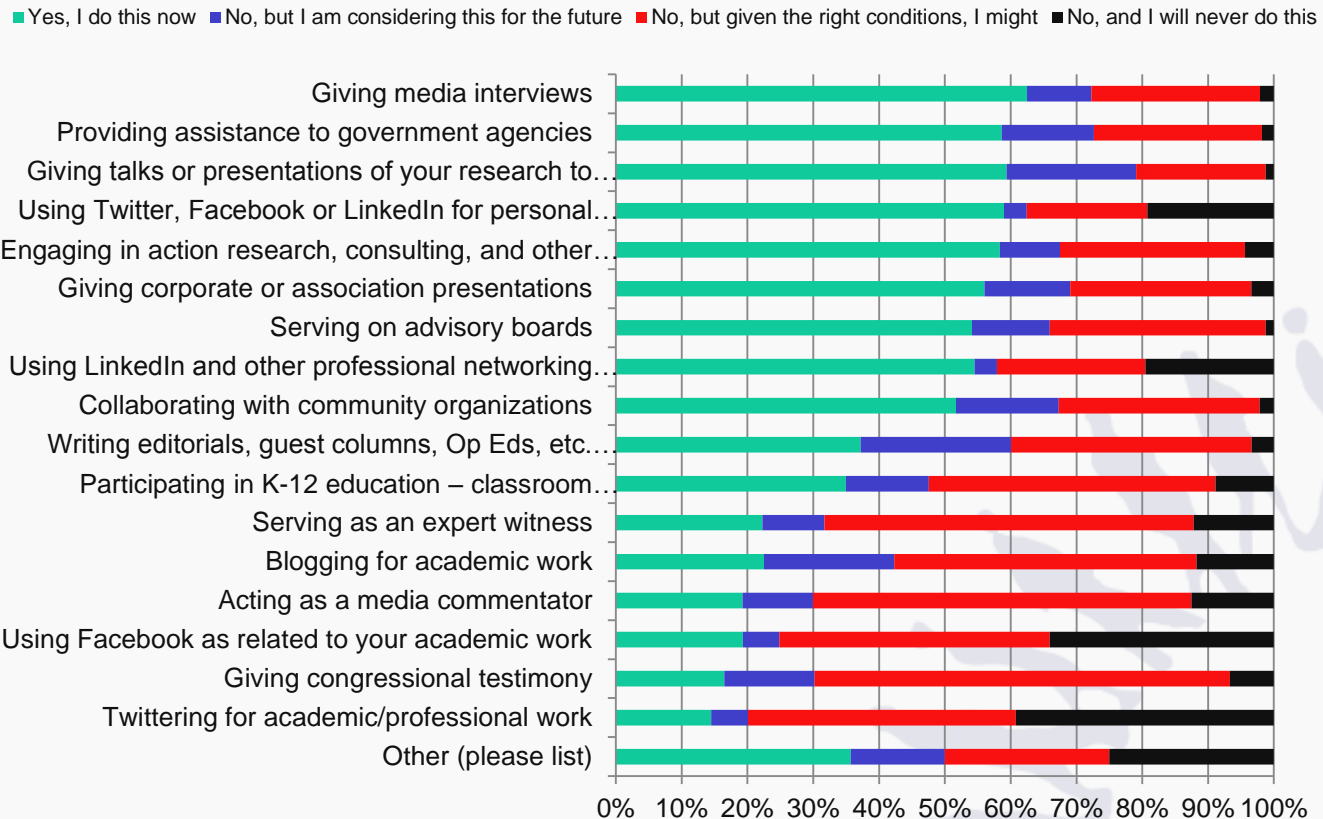
- Generation split
 - Younger generation wants engagement
 - Most established academics do not see it as their role to engage – While academics often “believe the public is uninformed about science and therefore prone to errors in judgment and policy preferences,” they frequently do not accept any role “as an enabler of direct public participation in decision-making through formats such as deliberative meetings, and do not believe there are personal benefits for investing in these activities” (Besley and Nisbet, 2013).



✓ Why Should Academics Engage in Public and Political Discourse?

4. It is already happening

University of Michigan Faculty Survey: Have you done or do you intend to do any of the following public and/or political engagement activities (n=330)?



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Over 62% of respondents give media interviews, 59% provide assistance to government agencies and 59% give talks or presentations to the general public. 39% do not, and never will, use Twitter for academic/professional work; 35% say the same for Facebook (though 58% use Twitter and Facebook for personal use).

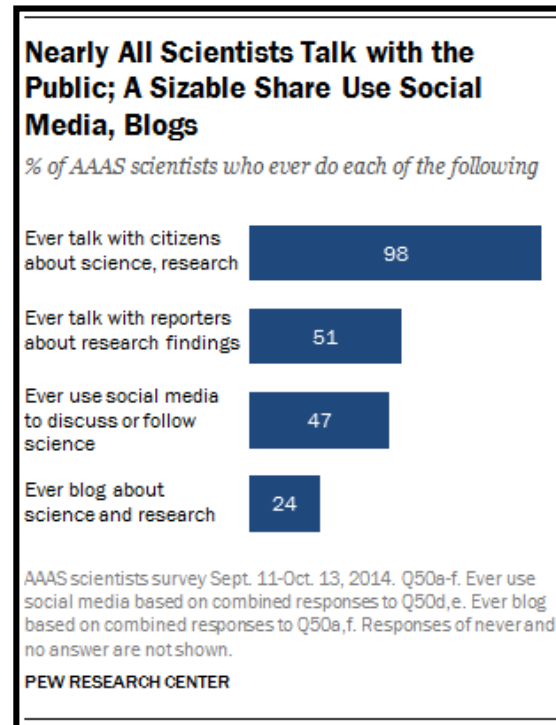
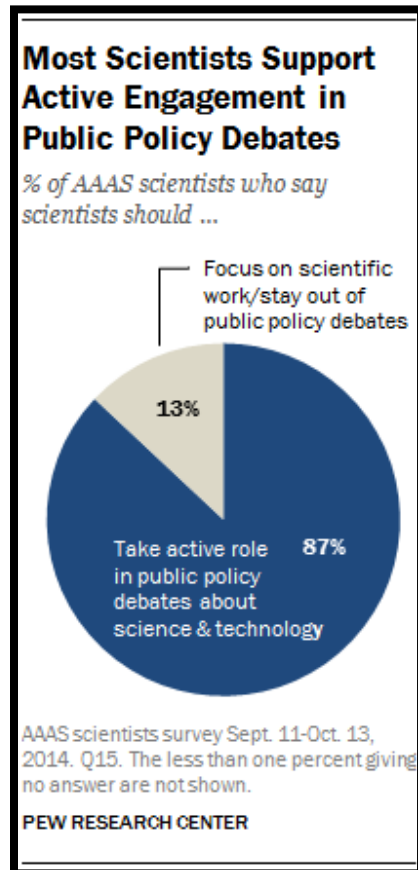
90% of respondents agree or strongly agree that public engagement informs public discussions and 86% agree or strongly agree that this is the role of academics. 66% believe that external engagement is complementary to their academic research.

56% believe this activity is not valued by tenure committees. 34% believe this activity is dangerous as it is often misquoted. 41% believe it is time consuming and distracting.

35% believe it is becoming increasingly valued by the academy.

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(n = 3,748)

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The **National Academies of Sciences** has hosted two Sackler Colloquia on “The Science of Science Communication” (National Academies of Science, 2012, 2013; Fischhoff, 2013)

The **Alfred P. Sloan Foundation** has begun a program in “Public Understanding of Science, Technology & Economics” (Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, 2013)

Growing number of centers and resources for engagement (i.e. the Alan Alda Center at **Stony Brook**, the Leopold Leadership Fellowship at **Stanford**, Science in Society at **Northwestern**, Public Engagement Project at **UMass**).

➤ The Urgency of Change – Two Views

- Science's "Social Contract" (Lubchenco, 1998, 2015)
- "We forget the privilege it is to have lifelong security of employment at a spectacular university. And I don't think we use it for its intended purpose. I think that faculty on average through the generations are becoming a bit careerist and staying inside our comfort zones. [But] If we're perceived as being an ivory tower and talking to one another and being proud of our discoveries and our awards and our accomplishments and the letters after our name, I think in the long run the enterprise is going to suffer in society's eyes, and our potential for impact will diminish. The willingness of society to support us will decrease." **President Mark Schlissel, University of Michigan**

➤ The Urgency of Change – Two Views

- Is American higher ed going the way of the big 3? (*The Economist*, 2010)
- "We are increasingly filled with hubris, filled with arrogance, cut off from the general public and unable to find an appropriate tone with which to communicate ... We need to communicate in ways that we've never even thought about communicating before because if we don't figure out how to deal with this ... the gap between the academic elite and everyone else will continue to grow, and what we now see as political debate will be people with pitchforks outside the door ... They want to know what we're doing, why we exist and why they're giving us money. This is a very serious thing that we need to focus on." **President Michael Crow, Arizona State University**

✓ What are the Rules of Engagement?

1. What is public engagement?
2. How should we engage?
3. What obstacles must be overcome to increase engagement?
4. Structural tools for supporting engagement?
5. What to expect from engagement.



✓ What are the Rules of Engagement?

1. What is public engagement?



1. What is the role of the academic in public and political discourse?

2. How should we engage?

2. Where is the line between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” public engagement?

3. What obstacles must be overcome to increase engagement?

3. When should an academic engage?

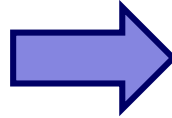
4. Structural tools for supporting engagement?

4. Who should engage in public discourse?

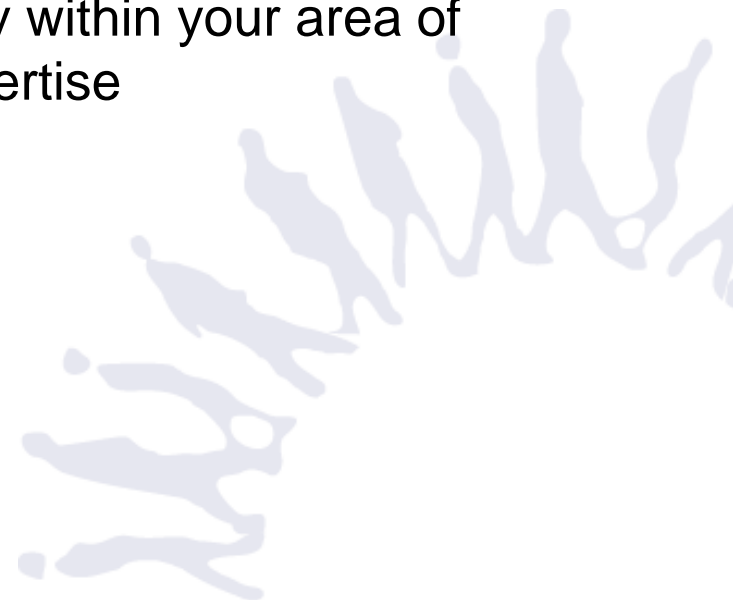
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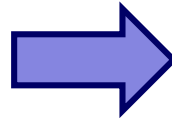


1. Move beyond the knowledge deficit model.
2. Know your audience.
3. Master social media before it masters us.
4. Stay within your area of expertise



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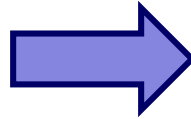


1. Formal rewards and tenure.
2. Informal culture.



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1. Employ science translators.
2. Training, formal and informal.
3. Recognize the limits of academic inquiry in the political sphere.

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1. Engagement is messy.
2. Engagement can be hostile.
3. Engagement can be rewarding.
4. Engagement can improve your research.
5. Engagement will change your publication strategy.

Thank you



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