

LTER ASM Working Group: Climate Change Communication: What Should the Conversation Be About?

Thursday, September 13, 2012

10:00am – 12:00pm, Wind River C

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Abstract of Working Group

Do we as LTER scientists have an obligation to talk about climate change with policymakers, land managers, and other decision makers? If so, what should we talk about, and how should we talk about it? Recent research into public learning about climate change suggests that dissemination of climate science alone is inadequate to make the broader impact we might argue we have been charged with. Coupled with insights from philosophy, social science, communication theory, and educational theory, it seems increasingly clear that merely debating or disseminating the science (the facts of the matter) may be fruitless and distracting at worse, or only an incomplete approach at best. Given the logic by which people reach policy decisions and the underlying motivation behind so-called climate science deniers, it seems wise to begin discussing how to think about climate change communication afresh. Where does that leave us? How might these cross-disciplinary realizations impact our climate science and the communication of that science? How can we engage with our stakeholders for meaningful discussion and action on climate change? Join us for an interactive session and deep dialogue on these questions. Please note that there are a few short articles posted for background reading.

Background Reading:

1. Introductory Chapter to Moral Ground
2. Yale Climate: Six Americas
3. Yale Climate: Climate Beliefs

Summary Report

We started the session by asking participants for a one word answer to the question: *“What’s one word that you think of when you hear the term ‘climate change communication’?”* Responses were:

Important, perspective, politics, listening, lost in translation, basic information, frustrating, imbalance, science-based, fear, denial, urban heat island, uncertainty, communication, preconception, stories, complex, disconnect, here and now, compromises, funny, challenging, opportunity, education, complicated, difficult, facts, resistance, obstacles, opportunities, answers, unpredictability, misunderstanding.

After that exercise which ‘took the temperature of the room’, we noted that participants expressed a fair amount of fear/negative associations with communication on this topic. We moved into a short summary of the ‘climate’ of climate change communication and what current research tells us. We followed with a discussion on logic, ethics, and values as it relates to doing something about climate change. Participants then broke into small groups to discuss one of two scenarios (based on real events at LTER sites).

1. You are asked to give a talk at your town’s environmental club about your LTER’s climate change research. During your talk, an obstinate member of the public, who is very much a climate change believer with strong environmental leanings, really attacks you for discussing climate change in irrelevant ways. He said that you discuss those things that we, in his words,

have no control over but fail to discuss climate change issues in a meaningful way that really helps communities deal with the issue.

2. You are asked to talk to a farmers group about LTER research and climate change. During the talk, one farmer stands up and says “We talked about variations in the weather and precipitation, well in the time that I’ve been farming, this past growing season and the 2009 growing season, were as opposite as I have ever seen in my whole career. How useful are 'adaptation' practices when things are all over the board? How do your long-term trends help me decide how to farm next spring?”

Participants discussed what they would/wouldn’t say, and how that might change if they were working with a different audience group.

We finished the working group with a conversation about: *“As an LTER group, are there important questions/projects we are missing, not doing? What would help us with climate change communication?”* Participants identified the following:

- Empower local sites to engage with their local networks
- Provide support for LTER sites to have a liaison with their community
- Have a section on the LTER website: include frequently asked questions and provide links to other useful information (this would make us not only identify the frequently asked questions but also answer them.)
- Partner and connect to other organizations
- Learn when NOT to give advice/recommendations to decision makers
- When working with non-scientist groups, empower others to participate in the conversation (ask them what they think we need to do, what they observe) and in effect demand that they use the knowledge that THEY have
- Site-specific information is really important; a centralized approach for the LTER network may not work
- Address a local issue that your community is already dealing with...then that can lead into a conversation about climate change and how that will affect the issue
- Take the opportunity to teach about the importance of long-term data, and that without it we wouldn’t know that the climate is changing.
- Link community members with LTER scientists
- Have annual meetings with Extension to link LTER with Extension educators across the network; they are the ones on the ground and will know the issues, communities
- Facilitate advocacy
- Link local knowledge at LTER sites with local communities
- Have public seminars of our science (open house events; maybe even have an annual LTER Network open house, where all sites have an open house on the same day)
- Develop relationships with others in the community; spend time doing this, especially with those we may not associate with

- Critically reflect on ourselves and answer the difficult question: Is our LTER science relevant for climate change solutions? Is there a value to add to our research portfolios to better address this?

Participant List

31 participants and 2 organizers representing 14 LTER sites and one international participant

Site	Name
AND	Chris Thomas
AND	Lorien Reynolds
AND	Michael Nelson; co-organizer
ARC	Laura van der Pol
BNZ	April Melvin
BNZ	Miho Morimoto
BNZ	Jan Dawe
BNZ	Brian Charlton
BNZ	John Yarie
CAP	Marcia Nation
CAP	Wen-Ching Chuang
CAP	Xiaoxiao Li
CCE	Mike Landry
CCE	Mark Ohmar
CDR	Elizabeth Kleynhans
CDR	Clare Kazanski
CWT	Tara Ursell
JRN	Jane Smith
KBS	Ariane Peralta
KBS	Christine Sprunger
KBS	Brendan O'Neill
KBS	Julie Doll; co-organizer
LUQ	Tana Wood
LUQ	Omar Gutierrez del Arroyo
NTL	Terry Daulton
SBC	Carol Blanchette
SBC	Gabriel Rodriguez
SGS	Mary Hunter-Laszlo
SGS	Amanda Morrison
South Africa	Nicky Allsopp
VCR	Jennie Rheuban
VCR	Dana Gulbransen
VCR	Alia Al-Haj
VCR	Jill Greiner