

Visual Science Communication

PBC-499 – Independent Study
Quarter – Spring 2025

Dr. Liz Anna Kozik (she / her)

Fridays 4/4 - 6/6/25, 9:30-10:30am, Green Room Upstairs

lkozik@ChicagoBotanic.org

<https://liz.kozik.net/teaching/>

Welcome to Visual Scicomm! I'm excited to work with you all to build an exploratory, playful space to approach visual science communication from multiple angles. Together, I intend to help teach you some of the building blocks skills of both science communication and visual design, and support your individual learning goals as they apply to our shared subject.

While, as scientists, we are trained to think in papers and walls of jargon-filled text, it's not always the best way to reach audiences outside our respective fields. Sometimes even close cousins like taxonomists talking to community ecologists can stumble into communication barriers. For the sake of our work, we need to be able to talk about what we do and share it well. This is true whether it's forging a professional collaboration, writing a grant, teaching volunteers, or mobilizing community members. Visual science communication takes walls of text and turns them into something that's less intimidating, more compelling, and easier to share.

What will we do in this 499?

- Spend approximately 1 hour in class and 4 hours out of class on work each week
- Read. Write. Draw. Talk. Look at cool things. Share with each other.
- Learn and practice some methods and theories of science communication
- Learn and practice some theory and tools of visual design
- Collaboratively and constructively support each other in improving our practices
- Write, build, and produce one completely finished scicomm intervention

What topics will we be exploring?

- Content - What is our topic and how best should we explore it?
- Audience - Who are we trying to speak to? How do we best approach them?
- Format - What shape is most effective for this topic and audience?
- Aesthetics - What kind of look will best reach our goals?
- Distribution - How can we get the product to the people?

What assignments will need to be completed?

- Weekly assignments that will build our final projects up, bit-by-bit
- Relevant readings, as they make sense
- Mid-quarter project checkpoint individual meeting
- Final, complete project, resolved in its printed or digital-native form

Grading will be determined on:

Attendance and Discussion (30%)

The thing about science communication is that it requires interaction between people. You are each others' best resource. If you need to miss class, please contact Liz to find alternative accommodations.

Work Assignments (40%)

This is what we're here to do! Our project will be combinations of in and outside of class work. It's not that the things we make have to be perfect, but we need to be accountable for putting good faith effort into doing our best.

Preparation of Materials (30%)

We can't do any of this work if we don't have something to work with! Out of classroom work will be required and we will not be able to progress in the classroom without it. Students need to be prepared for class.

AI Policy - TLDR: Please don't.

We will not be using any AI generated images. I *will* recognize them, there *will* be consequences. Each student gets one accidental whoopsie, but otherwise will receive a 10% grade deduction for each AI image use.

I recognize that you may choose to use AI to generate text. This will be a waste of your time and mine. Science communication is about learning to be deliberate and intentional with our language. If your language is dictated by AI, then you might as well not take this class.

Cost

I will do everything I can to ensure you do not have to spend any money. We will be working with free software and with readings available online. For any publications, we will work with Jeremie to figure out how to pay for any printing or hosting costs.

Disability Accommodations

If you have a disability that could impact your work in this class, please contact me at the start of the quarter so that reasonable accommodations may be worked out to support your success.

Respect In the Classroom

I am committed to fostering a classroom community that respects the different experiences of students. Our various forms of diversity are our greatest resources: differences of immigration status, gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, political affiliation, religion, and language, among others. I expect students to be relentlessly kind in their criticisms and open to learning from the perspectives of others. I am committed to using your preferred name and pronouns. If these change during the semester, I invite you to let me know so that you can work together to develop a plan to share this information in a way that is safe for you.

Where Are Due Dates, Readings, Homework, etc?

I am committed to keeping our webpage up to date with all the information and documents you need. I have plans but am keeping things flexible so I can follow your individual needs.

Website for news and updates - <https://liz.kozik.net/teaching/>