

# GRAD starter

**PROJECT TITLE:** ComSciCon Houston 2017

**PROJECT TAGLINE/CAPTION** (160 characters): ComSciCon Houston will strengthen science communication skills of current students through both hands-on professional development training and exposure to the local expert community.

**IMAGE:**



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**Primary Contact Department:** Chemistry

**Name of Group/Organization:** Rice ComSciCon Club (*to be established Fall of 2016*)

## PROJECT DETAILS

ComSciCon Houston provides a unique avenue to encourage graduate students in the Houston community to invest in their science communication skills. This two-day workshop will teach participants how to effectively communicate scientific content in their field to broad and diverse audiences and inspire students to seek opportunities to use these newly acquired skills. Each day will include two expert panel discussions, each with a specific underlying theme, such as communicating science to general audiences through writing, communicating via multimedia, communicating science in policy, and guidance for seeking careers in science communication. The workshop will also feature a keynote speaker, who will be an invited expert with significant contributions to the field of science communication. Participants will have the opportunity to expand their professional network by interacting with the speakers and experts during organized social events. Finally, participants will be required to hone their science communication skills in an interactive “write-a-thon” component and will produce either a popular science article or video storyboard by the end of the workshop.

**Timeline:** If the project will take place at a specific time and place, please give details. Is it a one-time event or a series?

The ComSciCon Houston workshop will be established under the umbrella of ComSciCon, a national organization that began at Harvard in 2013 and has grown into science communication workshops in Chicago, North Carolina, and at Cornell. Our event is planned for the spring of

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2017 (March 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>) and will be the first ComSciCon workshop hosted in Texas. While this proposal is written for a one-time event, we hope that this pilot conference will motivate students with a shared interest in science communication to organize biennial or annual events in coming years.

**Audience:** Who is your target audience? (e.g. program-specific, interdisciplinary, or university-wide? Will undergraduates, faculty, staff, or postdocs be involved? Any off campus participants?)

ComSciCon workshops are organized by graduate students and postdocs for the benefit of students. The target audience will be graduate students from Rice, the Medical Center, the University of Houston, and Texas Southern University. Off-campus participants will consist of the panelists/speakers and students from other local graduate programs .

While we will invite applications from students outside of Rice, the three co-chairs and staff sponsor are all associated with Rice. They are, as follows:

Anneli Hoggard, co-chair, PhD candidate in Chemistry

Mohit Jolly, co-chair, PhD candidate in Bioengineering

Dr. Jennifer Herricks, co-chair, joint post-doctoral fellow at the Baker Institute and Baylor College of Medicine

Dr. Jennifer Wilson, director of the Center for Written, Oral, & Visual Communication.

**How many people do you anticipate will participate?**

As a first year event, the workshop will be limited to 30 student participants and about 20 expert science communicators. Between the workshop participants, speakers, and organizing committee we anticipate hosting about 60-70 people total.

**Marketing Plan:** How do you plan to publicize the project?

The project will be publicized aggressively through Rice and other institution-specific channels. Dissemination efforts will focus on science-based graduate programs both through email lists and newsletters, and flyers posted at relevant locations in each participating institution.

Additionally, the marketing plan involves a targeted social media component through ComSciCon Houston's Twitter, Facebook, and online presence, which we are in process of setting up.

## **ADVANCEMENT**

**What are the goals of the project?**

The specific goals of ComSciCon Houston are twofold. First, ComSciCon Houston will improve the science communication skills of each workshop participant through peer-review and expert instruction. Participants will be trained in how to communicate their own research to outside audiences in a simple yet accurate manner. They will then practice their approach in short oral presentations ("pop talks") and written work during the conference. The second goal is to help create and foster a science communication network in Houston, providing long-term opportunities for student professional development. The workshop will introduce students to experts and enthusiasts in the field in order to promote meaningful connections in the community and motivate students to hone their science communication skills. We hope that this



conference will inspire a greater awareness of science communication in the Houston area, and will eventually have concrete positive impact on how our research discoveries are shared with external audiences such as policymakers and the public.

**Briefly explain the need for the project and how it will promote excellence in scholarship, training, and/or development?**

Communication of scientific research to diverse audiences is a difficult challenge that is often overlooked by the academic community, especially when training science students. The end result is that many scientists do not prioritize communication outside of their field, which perpetuates misunderstanding of the scientific process by the general public and reduces funding opportunities from basic to translational research in both the academic and private sector. Workshops such as ComSciCon Houston aim to empower young scientists with the tools and connections they need in order to improve their communication skills. We advocate that teaching young scientists how to communicate with broad audiences can increase the reach of their research as well as open doors to opportunities both in and out of academia.

**If this is an existing project/event or a similar one exists, describe how the project/event is being expanded or enhanced.**

Since June 2013 ComSciCon workshops organized by graduate students have appeared in cities around the U.S. that have significant concentrations of graduate students (such as Boston and the Research Triangle, but none of these efforts have targeted Texas or, more specifically, Houston. We seek to contribute to Houston's historically impressive science community by providing local support for graduate student involvement in communication efforts.

**If your proposal is for a pilot project, suggest how it might develop over a three-year period.**

In addition to planning the first ever ComSciCon Houston, we will establish a club at Rice University that will take charge of improving and continuing the conference in the years to follow. We hope to establish ComSciCon Houston as a biennial or annual event, aiming for at least one more local conference in the next 3 years. Future workshops will further expand the science communication network in the Houston area, and will help future generations of graduate students excel both in research and professionally.

**Describe how you will measure the success and impact of this project. Please, provide quantitative targets, if possible.**

We will track the impact of ComSciCon Houston in multiple ways. First, attendees will be required (*via* a refundable deposit) to submit pre- and post-workshop surveys that will investigate how their attitude towards science communication might have changed as a result of the conference. Additionally, these surveys will be used to improve future ComSciCon Houston events. We will also measure workshop success through publication of attendee texts and videos, submission of which will be encouraged and supported by the conference organizers. Finally, we will evaluate impact based on network expansion (measured through number of applicants, and involved partner institutions) from year to year.



## BUDGET

### *Itemized Budget*

Please, provide an itemized budget. List each item, a description, and the anticipated cost.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Lunches	Catered lunch for 60 people for 2 days	\$2,500
Breakfast	Breakfast options for 60 people 2 days	\$800
Closing reception	Food and drinks provided at Valhalla	\$300
Coffee	Coffee provided for afternoon breaks	\$400
Snacks and beverages	Snacks and sodas / water provided throughout the day	\$500
Printing	Programs, flyers, swag	\$600
Parking	Parking provided for non-Rice attendees for 2 days	\$750
Honoraria / Gifts*	Keynote speaker honoraria of \$500 and gifts for panelists (*Note: The national ComSciCon gives a \$200 honorarium for each panelist; what we can afford really depends on the level of support we receive.)	\$1,000
T-shirts	T-shirt with conference logo provided to attendees and volunteers	\$1,000
Photographer	Photographer will be hired to document the conference	\$500
Lunch venue	Will reserve Farnsworth Pavilion as a student organization	\$0
Workshop venue	Will reserve Brockman 101	\$0
<b>Total Expenses</b>		<b>\$8,350</b>

### *Funds from other sources*

Please, provide any information on funds from other sources that you have secured or potential funds that you plan to apply for.

<b>Source</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Rice University CWOVC	Secured	\$1,500
GSA professional development	Potential	\$500
Partner institutions	Potential	\$3,000
Industry sponsors (e.g., donations of food, gift items, or social media expertise)	Potential	\$1,000
<b>Total Amount</b>		<b>\$6,000</b>



**If the project/event has been offered in the past, how was it supported?**

Not applicable to this specific event. However, the ComSciCon events in other cities are supported by Harvard, MIT, Northwestern, University of Chicago, Cornell, Duke, University of North Carolina, and North Carolina State.