Doctoral Workshop: Writing on Science, Technology, and Society: Op-Eds, Vignettes, Discussion Pieces

Prof. Dr. Sebastian Pfotenhauer

Description:
Experts – including academic researchers – are increasingly under pressure to write for broader audiences and publish in non-academic outlets. They are expected to comment on current events, clarify their position on the latest scientific or technological developments, and put their work into meaningful dialogue with various publics. Scholars of STS and Science Policy in particular frequently find themselves in the challenging role of a commentator and multi-way translator between science, politics, and society at large.

This workshop introduces young and emerging scholars with an interest in STS to various short writing formats beyond traditional journal articles or book publications. In particular, we will discuss and experiment with op-eds, opinion pieces, vignettes, and discussion pieces. The goal of the workshop is to have each participant write one commentary/op-ed piece (~ 800 words) about a topic of their choice and submit it to an appropriate outlet (e.g. a newspaper) by the end of the term. Topics may (but don't have to) be related to the participant's thesis research.

Throughout the workshop, participants will (1) practice how to write (succinctly!) in English and iteratively improve on argument clarity, structure, and style; (2) work on finding "their own voice"; and (3) learn how to give, and work with, constructive peer feedback as an intellectual collective. The workshop will proceed in multiple stages, including a total of three in-person meetings (intro session, small-group meetings to discuss first drafts and feedback, final presentations) as well as peer-to-peer feedback via email.

Workshop participation is limited to 20 people. Preference will be given to MCTS doctoral candidates and post-docs, but graduate students and post-docs from other TUM departments are welcome to apply. Non-MCTS applicants are required to submit a short one-paragraph explanation to the course instructor (Sebastian.pfotenhauer@tum.de) of why this workshop is relevant for them. Decisions will be made on a first-come, first serve basis.

Total time commitment: 15h

Workshop language: English

Schedule (in-person meeting are in bold font):

May 5, 4-6PM	**Intro session: Discussion of different writing formats and examples**
Jun 2, noon	First drafts due
Jun 9, noon	Comments due

Jun 19
  • **9 AM (Group 1)**
  • **10:30 AM (Group 2)**
Jun 20
  • **9 AM (Group 3)**
  • **10:30 AM (Group 4)**
	Sessions to discuss comments (number of sessions depends on enrolment)

Jun 30, noon	Final draft due
Jul 7, noon	Votes due
Jul 11, 5 PM	**Final meeting, award ceremony**

Location: MCTS, Augustenstr. 46, room 354 (winter garden 3rd floor)

Literature:
The literature for this workshop consists of two parts – style guides and examples – both of which contain mostly very short pieces (i.e. 800 words or less). All literature should be read in advance of the first meeting. A few more (short) pieces around current events will be circulated the week before.

Style guides:
- Jarmul: How to write an op-ed? Duke University Office of News and Communication, 2013
- The Earth Institute: Writing and Submitting an Opinion Piece: A Guide. Columbia University, 2010
- Hall: Op-ed and You, and Shipley: And now a word from op-ed. NY Times (2004).
- Jasanoff: Writing in English and Writing Vignettes. Harvard STS Program, 2013
- Bhatt: Storyacious Practices: On Writing Vignettes. Storyacious, Oct 7 2013

Examples - Op-Ed:
- Wilsdon: The metric tide: an agenda for responsible indicators in research. The Guardian, July 9 2015.
- Pielke Jr.: Is science policy a theological matter? The Guardian, June 23 2015.
- Jasanoff, Hurlbut, Saha: Human genetic engineering demands more than a moratorium. The Guardian, April 7 2015.
- Karplus: The case for higher gasoline tax. NY Times, Feb 21 2013

Examples – Vignettes/Blog:
- Walker: My digital cemetery. NY Times, July 17 2015
- Schuh: Breaking the law? Assisted Reproduction and Tacit Normativity. STS.Next.20 Blog, June 17 2015
- Dahl Gjefsen: Counting Violence. STS.Next.20 Blog, Jan 14 2013
- Wellerstein: Dogs in space. Nuclear Secrecy Blog, June 26 2015

Examples - Discussion Pieces:
- Wellerstein: We don't need another Manhattan Project. Federation of American Scientists, Fall 2013
- Pfotenhauer: Trade Policy is Science Policy. Issues in S&T, Fall 2013