

I ILLINOIS

IB496: Storytelling in SciComm Fall 2026

Course Information

- Duration: Full Semester
- Contact Hours: Thursday 3:00 – 3:50 PM; one 50-minute lecture period each week
- Format: In-person
- Location: 4004, Natural History Building
- Weekly Hours of Expected Student Work, apart from instruction time: 2
- Credit Hours: 1 Credit Hour

Instructor Information

Dr. Philip Anderson (*you may refer to me as “Phil”*)

Associate Professor

School of Integrative Biology

- Contact information: andersps@illinois.edu
- Office location: 471 Morrill Hall
- Websites: www.philipslanderson.com; www.stims.sib.illinois.edu

Course Description

Offers an exploration of the use of storytelling, role play, cosplay, and improvisation for communicating science. Through a series of lectures, discussions and hands-on activities, students will explore a range of strategies to create science outreach with real impact for the public. Students develop skills in creative thinking, summarizing, and translating technical research papers for general audiences, designing and conducting scientific outreach events for a range of audiences and evaluating the impact of these activities.

Learning Outcomes

In this course, students will:

- Learn and develop skills for incorporating story structure and storytelling into science communication to the public.

- Learn how to adapt content for different audiences in different venues.
- Learn to minimize jargon and details and maximize concepts to create effective hands-on outreach activities.
- Recognize how the process of scientific discovery and method both resembles and differs from storytelling and discern how to not misrepresent science when using narrative methods.
- Explore methods for evaluating the effectiveness of science outreach activities.
- Utilize all this knowledge to create a group outreach event, conceived and performed by the class.

Course Materials

Learning Management System (LMS)

As an enrolled student, you will have access to the course from your Canvas dashboard. It is also accessible here: <https://canvas.illinois.edu/courses/69999>

What you will find on Canvas:

- Course syllabus
- Activities, videos and affiliated materials
- Updates from the instructor
- Resources, notes and handouts.
- Forum for discussing class projects

Announcements will be updated every week on the site and will be made visible on the main page. All schedules and deadlines will be posted on the announcement page when they are approaching. Announcements will also be made during lecture, but everything announced there will also be posted on the site.

If you have an inquiry, you can use the emails listed for the instructor. Their bio section will also note how fast to expect an answer. If you would like further one-on-one discussion with Dr. Anderson please reach out via email to set-up an appointment. Dr. Anderson can also meet with small groups of students for discussion if you prefer.

As with all communication in a class, the expectation is for students to act in a professional and kind manner when interacting with both each other and with instructors. A full description on netiquette is listed below.

Course Readings

Readings for lectures and discussions will be made available to students online via the Canvas site.

Course Requirements and Policies

Grading Criteria

This course is graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory rubric. The main requirements for achieving a satisfactory grade are attendance at both the weekly meetings and final Cosplay for Science class event, participation in class as well as during event preparation and handing in Framing and Short Video assignments.

Course Components

The course meets once a week on Thursday afternoons. The meetings will be a mix of topic discussions, discussions with guest lecturers, activities and work time for the final project event near the end of the term.

Topic Discussions

During the first half of the term, many of the course sessions will be topic discussions based on a set of paper related to a subject such as science communication strategies, narrative structure, and cosplay. Students will be expected to read 1-2 papers prior to the discussion with other papers made available that are recommended but not required. Discussions will be led by the instructor, but participation is expected from everyone and time will be taken for small group discussions during the class period. All reading materials will be made available on the Canvas site.

Activities

Two to three times throughout the term, normal class period will be used for interactive activities to help codify communication techniques being established throughout the course. These may include improvisational games and roleplay games. Participation is mandatory unless approval is given by the instructor.

Assignments

There will be two assignments given during the semester. One written and one involving making a short, 1-2 minute, video. Both will be handed in via the Canvas site.

Framing write-up: The students will be tasked with using either their own research or a recently published article and write a short summary of the main findings for the general public using framing techniques as discussed in class. As part of this assignment, they will also post their summary to a forum on the Canvas page to be commented on by astudents will give feedback on a preliminary draft from two other classmates. Students will then make revisions based on their peer's comments and submit a final version in Week 5.

Video Short: Students individually or in pairs will film a short (1-2 minute) video covering a basic scientific concept utilizing storytelling/cosplay. These videos will be submitted via Canvas. If the students are interested and *give permission*, their videos may be highlighted on the outreach Instagram for SIB.

Final Project

The final project will be a group Cosplay for Science event conceived, planned and executed by the students in the course. At the beginning of the term the date and location for the event will be set and beginning around week 8 we will begin working on planning what the event will be. This timing coincides with a guest lecture by Gabriel Philip-Santos, the co-founder of Cosplay for Science. Students will be responsible not only for planning the event but also advertising.

Late Assignment Policy

Passing this course is contingent upon timely submission of all assignments. The two assignments handed-in over Canvas will not be accepted late unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor or in light of a family emergency.

Class Attendance

This is an interactive discussion course and there is no substitute for regular class attendance. Students are expected to attend all class periods.

Absence Policy

Notify Dr. Anderson ***prior*** to class if you will have to miss. The only excuse for not informing the instructor prior to missing class is personal illness or tragedy in your immediate family. If you have any questions regarding these policies, please review the Office of the Dean of Students webpage [About Absence Letters](#). This page describes how absence letters should be requested.

Final Grade

In order to achieve an S for this course, the student must achieve the following

- No more than 2 unexcused absences from lecture.
- ABT and short video assignments handed in on time.
- Participation in discussions, activities.
- Participation in the final Cosplay for Science event.

Campus Academic Policies & Statements

Academic Integrity

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign [Student Code](https://studentcode.illinois.edu/) (<https://studentcode.illinois.edu/>) should also be considered as a part of this syllabus. Students should pay particular attention to Article 1, Part 4: Academic Integrity.

Academic dishonesty may result in a failing grade. Every student is expected to review and abide by the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1/part4/1-401/) (<https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1/part4/1-401/>). Ignorance is not an excuse for any academic dishonesty. It is your responsibility to read this policy to avoid any misunderstanding. Do not hesitate to ask the instructor(s) if you are ever in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, or any other breach of academic integrity.

Students with Disabilities

The University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana, is committed to ensuring that all students, including students with disabilities, do not experience barriers to learning and participating fully in class. Students who have a letter of accommodation from DRES are advised to share that with instructors as soon as possible to ensure accommodation needs can be discussed and met.

To obtain disability-related academic accommodations, disabled students must contact Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) as soon as possible. To contact DRES, please visit 1207 S. Oak Street, Champaign, call (217) 333-1970, email disability@illinois.edu, or visit the [DRES website](https://dres.illinois.edu/) (<https://dres.illinois.edu/>).

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

See [FERPA – Office of the Registrar](https://registrar.illinois.edu/academic-records/ferpa/) (<https://registrar.illinois.edu/academic-records/ferpa/>) for more information on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Mental Health

Significant stress, mood changes, excessive worry, substance/alcohol misuse or interferences in eating or sleep can have an impact on academic performance, social development, and emotional wellbeing. The University of Illinois offers a variety of confidential services including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, psychiatric services, and specialized screenings which are covered through the Health Service Fee. If you or someone you know experiences any of the above mental health concerns, it is strongly encouraged to contact or visit any of the University's resources provided below. Getting help is a smart and courageous thing to do for yourself and for those who care about you.

- Counseling Center (217) 333-3704
- McKinley Health Center (217) 333-2700
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255
- Rosecrance Crisis Line (815) 720-4953 (available 24/7, 365 days a year)

If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

This statement is approved by the University of Illinois Counseling Center

Community of Care

As members of the Illinois community, we each have a responsibility to express care and concern for one another. If you come across a classmate whose behavior concerns you, whether in regard to their well-being or yours, we encourage you to refer this behavior to the Connie Frank CARE Center (formerly the Student Assistance Center) in the Office of the Dean of Students. You may do so by calling (217) 333-0050 or by submitting an [online referral](https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/referral) (<https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/referral>). Based on your report, staff in the Connie Frank CARE Center will reach out to offer support and assistance.

Further, as a Community of Care, we want to support you in your overall wellness. We know that students sometimes face challenges that can impact academic performance (examples include mental health concerns, food insecurity, homelessness, personal emergencies). Should you find that you are managing such a challenge and that it is interfering with your coursework, you are encouraged to contact the [Connie Frank CARE Center](https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/CAREcenter) (<https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/CAREcenter>) (formerly the Student Assistance Center) in the Office of the Dean of Students for support and referrals to campus and/or community resources.

Disruptive Behavior

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the [Office for Student Conflict Resolution](https://go.illinois.edu/ReportMisconduct) (<https://go.illinois.edu/ReportMisconduct>), conflictresolution@illinois.edu, or (217) 333-3680 for disciplinary action.

Emergency Response Recommendations

Emergency response recommendations and campus building floor plans can be found at [Public Safety's Run, Hide, Fight website](https://police.illinois.edu/em/run-hide-fight/) (<https://police.illinois.edu/em/run-hide-fight/>). I encourage you to review this website within the first 10 days of class.

Religious Observances

It is the policy of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to reasonably accommodate its students' religious beliefs, observances, and practices that conflict with a student's class attendance or participation in a scheduled examination or work requirement, consistent with state and federal law. Students must make requests for accommodation in advance of the conflict to allow time for both consideration of the request and alternate procedures to be prepared. Requests should be directed to the instructor. An optional resource to assist students in making such requests can be found on The Office of the Dean of Students' [Religious Observances website](https://odos.illinois.edu/resources/students/religious-observances) (<https://odos.illinois.edu/resources/students/religious-observances>).

Sexual Misconduct Reporting Obligation

The University of Illinois is committed to combating sexual misconduct. Faculty and staff members are required to report any instances of sexual misconduct to the University's Title IX Office. In turn, an individual with the Title IX Office will provide information about rights and options, including supportive measures, resources, the campus disciplinary process, and law enforcement options.

A list of the designated University employees who, as counselors, confidential advisors, and medical professionals, do not have this reporting responsibility and can maintain confidentiality, can be found on [We Care Student Resources](https://wecare.illinois.edu/resources/students/#confidential) (<https://wecare.illinois.edu/resources/students/#confidential>).

Other information about resources and reporting is available on [At Illinois We Care](https://wecare.illinois.edu) (<https://wecare.illinois.edu>).

Veterans and Military Students

As a military-friendly institution, and per federal regulations and Illinois statutes, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign has established policies and procedures to accommodate military-connected students. In addition to the support available at the [Chez Veterans Center](https://chezveteranscenter.ahs.illinois.edu/) (<https://chezveteranscenter.ahs.illinois.edu/>), members of the National Guard or Reserves and active-duty military personnel with military obligations (e.g., deployments, training, drills) are encouraged to communicate these, in advance whenever possible, to the instructor. For policy details, see the Student Code on [Excused Absences and Departure from the University for U.S. Military or other U.S. National Defense Services](https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article3/part3/3-313) (<https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article3/part3/3-313>).

Course Schedule/Outline

Week	Topics	Instructional Activities
Week 1 August 27	• Introduction	NA
Week 2 September 3	• Discussion: Scientific Communication Strategies and Framing	Reading: Druckman & Luypia 2017; Fischhoff 2013 Framing assignment given
Week 3 September 10	• Guest Lecture: Dr. Hung Nguyen, Dept. Earth and Environmental Change	Post Framing write-up to forum
Week 4 September 17	• Discussion: Narratives in Science Communication	Reading: Dahlstrom 2014; Zehr 2014 Comment on Framing write-ups.

Week	Topics	Instructional Activities
Week 5 September 24	Guest lecture: Dan Keding, Professional Storyteller	Final ABT write-up due Short Video Assignment given
Week 6 October 1	Discussion: Expanding the Sci Comm Audience	Reading: Dawson 2014; Stofer et al. 2019
Week 7 October 8	Discussion: Cosplay	Reading: TBD
Week 8 October 15	Guest lecture: Gabriel Philip-Santos, C4S	Reading: Stoneberg et al. 2020
Week 9 October 22	C4S Event: Brainstorming	Short Video due
Week 10 October 29	C4S Event: Pitches	NA
Week 11 November 5	Guest Activity: Amber Schultz, Theater Studies	NA
Week 12 November 12	Guest Lecture: Lisa Lundgren, Utah State University	Reading: Lundgren et al. 2025
Week 13 November 19	Activity: TTRPG TBD	TBD
Week 14 November 26	Fall Break	NA
Week 15 December 3	C4S Event: Work time	NA
Week 16 Date: TBD	- C4S Event - Location: TBD	