



STEVEN CRUZ INSTITUTE

for Media, Science
+ Technology

2020 REPORT

FIU

Steven Cruz Institute
for Media, Science
+ Technology

School of Communication + Journalism

As science and technology continue to evolve and alter the ways in which we interact with each other, it is crucial that we develop innovative ways to communicate the often complicated and politicized issues that face our society. With this challenge in mind, the efforts of the **Steven Cruz Institute for Media, Science + Technology (SCI)** are aimed at improving public understanding of science and technology.

SCI supports interdisciplinary research and education as well as strategic media campaigns that connect top communication professionals and researchers with scientists and technology experts— with the ultimate goal of highlighting the connections that exist between us *all*.

By creating a space for these unique collaborations, the institute strives to strengthen our society through the very issues that stand to divide it.

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Message from the Directors

Dear friends,

On behalf of all of us at SCI, we would like to wish you a Happy New Year. Without a doubt, 2020 provided an incredible case study in communicating about media, science and technology. Last year ignited important social and academic conversations around health and disease, vaccines, the role of government on regulating speech about health and disease, increased awareness of the impact of humans on nature given the sudden slowdown in human activity due to COVID, and provided painful evidence of how race and social justice affect all aspects of our work. These conversations adapted our behavior with media technologies in a time when we were not able to congregate in person as we were accustomed, and much more.

All these events demonstrate the importance of the work of the Steven Cruz Institute. We are motivated by the need to better understand how our current media system mediates and moderates the spread of ideas, and how this has very real implications on the wellbeing of our communities and our planet. We invite you to read about our current projects and join us in this work that will inform policy and practice for the next generation. There are several ways to get involved:

- Apply to become an affiliate
 - <https://webforms.fiu.edu/view.php?id=1957461>
- Propose a brown bag lunch or discussion topic
 - Email sci@fiu.edu
- Follow us on Twitter
 - <https://twitter.com/fiusci?lang=en>
- Join our mailing list
 - <https://webforms.fiu.edu/view.php?id=2556286>

I would like to thank all our faculty, student and alumni affiliates, and the College of Communication, Architecture + The Arts for the financial and administrative support in our inaugural year. We look forward to an eventful second year with our partners.

Sincerely,

Susan Jacobson, PhD
Co-Director
sujacobs@fiu.edu

Maria Elena Villar, PhD, MPH
Co-Director
mevillar@fiu.edu

Projects

Conservation Messaging for Generation Z



Simply raising awareness about an environmental issue does not change behavior. It is necessary to craft messages that are relevant to audiences and rooted in communication and behavior change research. As part of a grant from the [National Geographic Society](#), four faculty members from FIU's [Department of Communication](#) and [Tropical Conservation Institute](#) developed strategic conservation communication campaigns and are conducting research aimed at tailoring wildlife conservation messages to Generation Z.

This project partners a conservation scientist (Cristina Gomes, PhD) with strategic communication students and faculty (Maria Elena Villar, PhD and Weirui Wang, PhD) to develop compelling content to support the conservation efforts of the Tropical Conservation Institute (TCI), targeting millennial and Gen Z multicultural audiences through digital media, and comparing the efficacy of different message variables.

Close to 4,000 people have participated in the research project so far, and the data is currently being analyzed by the research team for potential research conferences and publications.

Vaccine Hesitancy in Latin America



In light of mounting anti-vaccine sentiment and outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases, FIU's [Global Health Consortium](#) (GHC) and SCI launched an online campaign titled #VacunasYa, or #VaccinesNow, to address growing vaccine hesitancy in Latin America. For on-the-ground insight and expertise, the campaign team includes doctors and communication professionals from different Latin American countries. The campaign was initially launched on Thursday February 19, 2020, but was re-directed to address the COVID-19 pandemic and temporarily paused as a result.

The preliminary 2020 campaign, which addressed both vaccine hesitancy and COVID-19, generated over 85,000 impressions and 400 profile visits to the GHC Twitter account. Preliminary research and campaign results were presented at the [2020 GHC Global Health Conference of the Americas](#), which featured 64 global experts, including a keynote by the president of Colombia, Iván Duque Márquez.

Using insights from a social media analysis, the latest research on vaccine-related communication, surveys of health professionals and the general public in Latin America, and project consultants, the 2021 campaign will be tailored to the biggest challenges faced in these regions with vaccination, especially in light of the complications imposed by COVID-19.

For more information on our pre- campaign research on vaccine hesitancy in Latin America, view our 2019 report [here](#).

Drug Use and Social Media

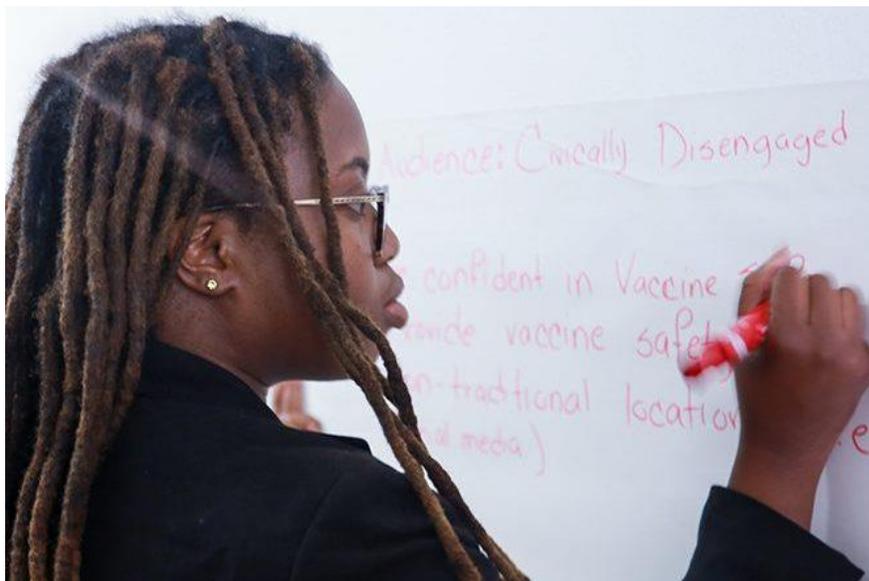


Drug use content in social media may have a profound impact on initiating or continuing illegal and legal drug use, but there is currently no systematic research on the role of social media in promoting and facilitating drug use in club settings, and how social media use around drug use differs across different social and demographic groups.

In collaboration with FIU's [Center for Research on US Latino HIV/AIDS and Drug Abuse \(CRUSADA\)](#) and as part of a subcontract of a [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#) funded research project, Drs. María Elena Villar and Weiriu Wang conducted research on the use and impact of social media on drug use among Hispanic club-goers in Miami.

The project involved focus groups and survey research with Latinx members of club culture in Miami to explore the use and impact of social media and Latinx culture on drug use. Preliminary results have been presented at the [SMCU 2020 International Interdisciplinary Mental Health Colloquium](#) and at the [CRUSADA Brown Bag Lecture Series](#). Additional data is currently being analyzed for potential research publications.

ComSciCon Miami



For the second year in a row, SCI supported the efforts of ComSciCon Miami as the workshop's fiscal sponsor. [ComSciCon](#) is a national science communication workshop that originated in Harvard University and has since branched out through several franchises. In 2019, SCI student affiliates Nadia Seeteram and Jessica Rodriguez served as the co-chairs for the first-ever [ComSciCon Miami](#), alongside a group of FIU graduate students who made up the committee.

This year, SCI student affiliates Stephanie Campo and Steffanie Rodriguez-Munguia served as the co-chairs for [ComSciCon Miami 2020](#) virtual workshop, which included speakers and panelists from across the U.S. and one international speaker. 26 graduate students from different universities in South Florida attended the day-long conference.

Affiliate Programs + Staff

Staff

Staff



Maria Elena Villar, PhD
Co-Director



Susan Jacobson, PhD
Co-Director



Jessica Rodriguez
Research Coordinator

Faculty Affiliates

Faculty Affiliates



Remy Dou, PhD
Assistant Professor
STEM Transformation
Institute



Carlos Espinal, MD
Director
FIU Global Health
Consortium



Cristina Gomes, PhD
Assistant Director
Tropical Conservation
Institute



John Kominoski, PhD
Associate Professor
Biological Sciences



Elizabeth Marsh, MFA
Assistant Professor
Department of
Communication



Mireya Mayor, PhD
CASE Director of Exploration
+ Science Communication



Melissa McCartney, PhD
Assistant Professor
STEM Transformation
Institute



John Stuart, AIA
CARTA Associate Dean for
Cultural and Community
Engagement



Tiffany Troxler, PhD
Research Associate
Professor, Institute of
Environment

Student Affiliates and Researchers

Student + Research Affiliates



Oluwabusola F. Adogba
Master of Health Services and Administration Student



Stephanie Campo, M.S.
PhD Student
Department of Earth & Environment



Melissa R. Goya
Undergraduate Student
Communication Arts



Brenda Guerrero
PhD Student
STEM Transformation Institute



Steffanie Munguia, M.A.
PhD Student
Department of Earth & Environment



Jessica Rodriguez
MS Student
Department of Earth & Environment



Nadia Seeteram, M.S.
PhD Student
Department of Earth & Environment



DaMarcus Snipes
MS Student
Global Strategic Communications



Vanessa Vieites
PhD Candidate
Department of Psychology



Umma Yahaya, M.S.
SCI Research Affiliate

Student Affiliate Testimonials

"To me, science communication represents the opportunity to democratize science and to meet people where they are, to convey how science is very much a part of their life. It is the opportunity to craft stories and visuals that make powerful information relevant and actionable in life decisions. In my field, science communication translates to helping people to understand what a changing climate means for our world and our way of life, as well as the need for us to simultaneously reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt equitably to the changes that we will experience." - Nadia Seeteram, M.S.

"Because my work is about connecting with people, my view on science communication is colored by this lens... Science communication is a tool for bringing different groups to a place of common understanding. A major priority for me is decolonizing scientific research, especially in the Caribbean, where there is a long history of exploitation and exclusion of local people by foreign scientists. There is no path to improving coastal management without dismantling this history and building trust, and science communication is an important tool in this journey." - Steffanie Rodriguez- Mungia, M.S.

Graduate Certificate in Science Communication



Science communication is increasingly recognized as critical for establishing public understanding of issues in the world. With a growing number SciComm job opportunities, the Graduate Certificate in Science Communication offers STEM and communication graduate students the opportunity to gain SciComm skills in an academic setting.

In the Fall 2020 semester, SCI launched this graduate certificate program within CARTA's Department of Communication, making it one of only two certificates of its kind in the Florida State University system. Four graduate students across different FIU colleges and departments enrolled in the certificate for its debut semester.

Partnerships

SCI collaborates with fellow FIU Institutes, government organizations, and universities abroad to build bridges between scientists, leaders in tech, and communicators. Our partnerships allow us to broaden our scope and impact while creating meaningful connections with different communities.

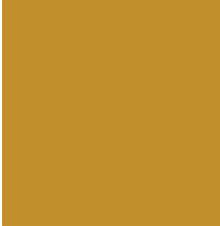


Online International Interdisciplinary Colloquium

**Mental health on university campuses
facing contemporary challenges:
from discrimination to COVID-19.**

Converging perspectives: Communication, Law and Psychology.





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