

## **Texas A&M AgriLife Extension**

Fatyma A. Lawal

Fatymalawal@tamu.edu

### **Abstract**

The Science Influencer program is the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) funded research, education, and extension program for undergraduates. The Science Influencer program built a skillset that widened the idea of science communication and journalism. Alongside the STEM knowledge, this program establishes the bridge between science, social media, and writing. The curriculum of *Science Communication and Public Engagement* (AGCJ 489) was centered in science research and experiences in agriculture all while highlighting the need for more suitable science communication especially for people who are not interested in science or are not STEM focused. Further, educating what it means to be an effective communicator and have influence on readers. Throughout the semester, assignments and projects sculpted how to approach the Summer internship aspect of the program. Training students to analyze the target audience, disseminate innovative science communications content for current science issues, publish a weekly blog and or vlog about said issues, engage in conversations with the public about food, agriculture, natural resources, and human sciences as well as creating professional networks with researchers. Expanding the realm of mainstream communication and social media content, the science influencers summer internship prompted an undergraduate level opportunity to redefine science communication.

*Keywords: Science communications, Agriculture, Disaster Recovery, Newswriting, Media*

### **Introduction or Literature Review**

#### **Texas A&M AgriLife Extension**

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension communications focuses on the publications and news of Texas' agriculture, natural resources, and life sciences through major media. An organization of academic professors, county officers, and volunteers collaborate in disseminating knowledge and research into findings, publications, and news reports. Disaster Recover and Assessment encompasses educating Texans about disaster relief, assessment, preparedness, response, and recovery in conjunction with supplying resources to mitigate the effects of natural disasters.

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

For the summer internship requirement, I interned under Blair Fannin, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension marketing and communications. The objectives of the internship were mapped into five specific targets. The most important objective was to be able to create scientific media writing for lay audiences structured the entire summer. Drafting media relations for agricultural and science audiences followed as weekly blog posts and social media content were mandatory. Media pitching to agricultural and general news outlets which caters to the news writing and Disaster Assessment and Recovery writing assignments. Likewise, crisis communication related to disaster preparedness and response incorporated scientific

understanding of agriculture, crops, and cattle and the effects of weather. Within those objectives, field days and meetings were used to construct event and educational media coverage.

### **Methods**

To stay current with everyday agriculture policy news, Fannin assigned daily morning debriefs. Taking information from major streaming sites that broadcast global and local agriculture policy, food and science research journals, and marketing information that could affect farmers and ranchers, I was tasked to write three brief assessments that could be potentially featured in a news story. Over the course of the 8-week summer internship, excluding field days, I wrote short excerpts of current agriculture policy and geographical changes. This daily exercise allowed me to become more familiar with agriculture media, formatting of news writing, and training quick writing skills. I attended weekly meetings to upkeep content and changes within AgriLife Extension. To add, I also hosted meetings with other Extension agents across Texas for more information and clarity for AgriLife Today posts. While practicing pushing my pen and writing every day, I was also gaining a multitude of communication skills by interacting with various Extension and D.A.R. agents.

### **Results**

In total, two crisis and prevention releases, seven articles, and twelve social media posts were produced to fulfill the purpose and objectives of the internship. The main outlets of media AgriLifeToday.com and Instagram, distributed the content I created for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and Science Influencers, respectively.

### **Conclusions**

I learned more skills than notable throughout the stretch of this internship. Along with the Science Influencer, AGJC experience, Texas A&M Agriculture and Blair Fannin gave real world experiences that have prepared me for a future career in science communications.

### **Recommendations, Implications, and/or Application**

I have used this experience in my everyday life. All writing assignments are leveled on a higher self-grading scale. In writing intensive chemistry courses, I go the extra mile to create universally understandable content. I have been more intentional with social media content. In interviews and delivering speeches or talks, I have used ideas of target audiences and communication ideals to guide the entire performance, from writing to delivery. Everything I have learned between the Science Influencer program and Texas A&M Agrilife has primed me for the next steps of my life.

### **References**

*Science Influencers, Preparing students for effective science communication.* Science Influencers. (2023, November 20). <https://scienceinfluencers.org/about/>