

Looking Back and Looking Forward

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SPEAKERS

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Ricky Telg 00:04

This is Science by the Slice, a podcast from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Center for Public Issues Education. In this podcast, experts discuss the science of issues affecting our daily lives reveal the motivations behind the decisions people make, and ultimately provide insight to solutions for our lives.



Phillip Stokes 00:28

Hello, and welcome to Science by the Slice, I'm Phillip Stokes, one of the hosts of the show and education coordinator at the UF/IFAS PIE Center. And we're back for season two. All of us at the PIE Center are excited to produce a whole new season a fascinating and thought provoking episodes. 2021 was our first season and we have a whole slate of new episodes lined up for 2022. In Season One, we hosted monthly series on different topics that included COVID-19, industrial hemp, the food supply chain during the pandemic, rural Mental Health, hurricanes, mosquitoes, the effects of heat on our bodies, harmful algal blooms, science communication, and agritourism. If you missed any of those, you can, of course, go back and listen any time. And for this very first episode of season two, we're going to do a bit of looking back and looking forward. In looking back, we'll hear from some of our previous speakers. And while doing so, the main idea I'd like to focus on is trust. Trust is one of the ideas we discussed frequently at the PIE Center when conducting social science research, and also in our education programs. Trust is interesting, because when it exists among groups, you don't really think about it or notice it. But when there's an absence of trust, it's very apparent. So to dive into this theme a bit more in this episode, I'd like to start off by playing some clips from season one. And I think it's fitting to start season two, right where we started season one, with the topic of COVID-19. These clips are from our January 2021 series about the pandemic. Keep in mind, the statements being said here were recorded in the latter part of 2020. That's over a year ago, before vaccines were widely distributed throughout the US. And when there seemed to be many more questions than answers as it related to the pandemic. Up first, this is Dr. Ilaria Capua, from the University of Florida's One Health Center of Excellence.

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Ilaria Capua 02:35

Okay, for so for this one, this one is is not going to go away. It's not it is here to stay, and it will continue to circulate for years to come, it will most probably continue to circulate in a vaccinated population, which is good, right? Because we will have a vaccine and so the number of severe cases will go down. So now what we can do with our behaviors, which is what we we were, you know, actually was very clear at the start was we could flatten the curve, you can't zero the curve, right? That means that the virus will continue to circulate. However, you talk about behaviors. And my question for you is What if everybody knew, and had personal protective equipment like masks at home, that would have allowed them to stop the initial spread. And so this goes back to behavior. And I think that we must, we must learn certain things that the pandemic has shown us to make sure that the next time we do much better than this.

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Phillip Stokes 03:56

And here's Dr. Glen Morris, director of the Emerging Pathogens Institute at the University of Florida,

C

Carl Van Ness 04:02

and I think we'll probably reach the day where getting a Corona virus vaccine is something that one does routinely. And again, we're still not sure how long protection is going to last. But, you know, if I were to bet, based on our understanding of the immune response to the to the human endemic coronaviruses that just cause the common cold and keep in mind you get a cold every year. So if you're infected one year, you're not necessarily protected the next year. We we may well need to be immunizing everybody annually, similar to what we see with influenza. So you know, when you go to your doctor's office, he or she may well say Okay, time for your flu shot and your Coronavirus shot. But again, that's it's hard to say for sure we're way too early in the process to predict. But nonetheless, I think we are moving into a situation. I mean, this is not going to be like measles or some of the other childhood vaccines, where you get the vaccine once or maybe once or twice, and then you're protected the rest of your life. The odds are, we're going to be all of us becoming very familiar with Coronavirus vaccines, really for the rest of our lives.

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Phillip Stokes 05:28

Okay, so if I take away one thing from these two clips, it's this, that both experts were pretty spot on with their assessment and prediction of things to come with COVID-19. You know, one of the things that COVID-19 pandemic has done is put science in the work of scientists in the public spotlight. The public is engaging in science in a way that has potentially never happened before. People can access information about new discoveries pretty much as they happen, which is why this topic the pandemic, is one we can examine when thinking about trust and trust in science. Here's a clip from the same series in January of 2021. With Dr. Shelly Rampold

currently an assistant professor at the University of Tennessee, I spoke with her when she was with the PIE Center back in late 2020. She explains how the sources that people say they trust aren't necessarily the sources people use for day to day practical life.

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Shelli Rampold 06:26

We consistently see concerns about other people knowing the key information they need to know to make a decision about A, B or C, whatever it is that we're talking about. And we consistently see people say that they would be more likely to use these trusted, you know, official sites or sources of information or that they trust these official websites or sources, and whatnot. And then when we do a little bit more deeper of information analytics, where people are actually getting information, they say I don't I don't trust social media, but that's where they're seeing information. So it's, it's kind of creates a little bit of a conundrum for us in communications that, okay, they say, if they had their choice, they would get it from trusted source A, B and C, they trust source A, B, and C, but when they're actually seeing information, it's information shared by Uncle Joe, through Aunt Sally from somewhere else. And that's where they're actually receiving it. So like, where they say they would go and what they trust versus what they're actually using looks very different. So we're kind of it's kind of a challenge for us in the communications field of what do we do with that information? We know what they you know, we know these things, but we know what their actual behaviors are. So what do we do it that now,

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Phillip Stokes 07:44

In that clip, Dr. Rampold is discussing not only the science information or the substantive facts, but also the source of the information and how that influences trust. Obviously, information sources, that is who you're hearing something from, is a major factor in one's level of trust. Listen now to Michelle Miller. She's a social media influencer on the topic of agriculture and farming. This is from our October series on science communication and Michelle discusses how she thinks about building trust with her followers.

M

Michelle Miller 08:18

Yeah, so I think that's the beauty of a lot of bloggers and influencers is that when you build a following you build trust. And my goal is, you know, yes, do I talk about science and everything, but I want people to know me. And that's the beauty of social media as well is when when you have a platform, people get to know you they see. I mean, I'm thinking of like 20 other people off the top of my head that I follow. Why do I follow them, because I see their homes, their children, their pets, their husbands, whoever it is that you feel connected to them as a person. And so you just want to follow them because it's just like anything like what TV shows do we watch? And why? You know, do they make you laugh? Do they make you cry? Do they feel something? And so when you're trying to have a voice in the discussion, it's important to keep it real, right? If it's too stiff, and stale and boring, you're not really going to generate a following.

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Phillip Stokes 09:07

Clearly, there's not just one way to develop trust amongst a group of people and there are many different outlets and styles to communicate science information. In fact, many scientists have used various platforms of social media to communicate information related to the pandemic. One big question going forward is how much does the COVID-19 pandemic influence how people think about science, the work of scientists, as well as people's trust in the scientific enterprise overall. I'd like to close out this brief encapsulation of season one with respect to trust in science by playing one last clip about effective communication. Here's Dr. Lisa Lundy, Associate Professor of Agricultural Communication at the University of Florida. She also spoke in our October series on science communication. Here she talks about how effective communication is more audience focused than anything else.

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Lisa Lundy 10:06

I think the essence of really good effective science communication is learning to listen well. If you're communicating on behalf of a scientist, or learning about a subject that you have to communicate with, you have to really learn to listen to that scientists and are to a group of scientists and what they're telling you about their work and what it means and why it's important, and actively listening to them. The flip side, if you're trying to communicate to an audience, I think you have to learn to really listen well to that audience. And let them tell you what they care about, and what their needs are and what they're interested in. And looking for, okay. There's actually a researcher at the University of Wisconsin Madison, Dominique Brossard, who I, I love, just listening to what she has to say about science communication. And I've heard her say that really effective science communication is finding a rug that we can all stand on. You know, I think about right now, of course, everything is about COVID-19, and vaccines, and there's all these different viewpoints about vaccines. But for, really, for most people, we do care about our health, and we care about protecting our families and our and the people that we love. And so that's a rug that we can get everyone to stand on. And then how can we build from that to create mutual understanding. And so, to me, that's a lot of listening is what's required for good science communication.

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Phillip Stokes 11:51

So far, we have been looking back at previous episodes of our podcast. And now let's take a look forward. Over the next two months, in February and March, we're hosting a series about the role of Land Grant Institutions, and how they are changing, particularly with respect to diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice, you'll hear leaders at the University of Florida, ask some tough questions, and discuss some of the challenges of the past.

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Andra Johnson 12:20

And because of that, they could never really fully be what they were capable of being or producing what they're capable of producing, because they simply just did not have access did not have access to some of the programs and so on and so forth. So it was it was this limitation. And so one of the things that even at a young age, I always knew that somehow I was going to work to to, to deal with that to come up with a solution for that so that others would not have the same issue.

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Carl Van Ness 12:56

We also have to look at the land grant mission itself, do the land grant universities still perform their mission. The premise of the Morrill Act was inclusion, you know, those that, you know, couldn't previously attend a college now could.

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Phillip Stokes 13:10

In this series focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice, researchers and administrators discuss the social landscape at land grant institutions and talk about what's to come based on a growing awareness of the differences in lived experiences among groups of people.

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John Diaz 13:28

We're really in a time where folks understand how their own lived experience influences the way they look at the world. And so they're really wanting to gain that lens and framework so they're able to have that same set of awareness and reflection, based on the lived experiences of others. So it's just really, really cool and exciting to see folks that are engaged and wanting to be engaged to develop their own skill sets and develop themselves as people.

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Scott Angle 13:56

We acknowledge our problems, we acknowledge our our shortcomings, but that's the first step into making things better. But I'm here I see it every day that it's a state that believes that we have challenges, but we're going to overcome them and things will get better. And so I've only been here a year and a half. But I wake up every day just being happy that I'm grateful that I met a state that has a view of the future that is positive.

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Phillip Stokes 14:30

So be sure to subscribe to Science by the Slice so you'll be able to listen to this next series over the months of February and March. And all the other great episodes we have lined up after that for season two, including the topics of nutrition, honeybees, water quality and environmental contaminants, and mental health and substance misuse, just to name some of them. If you have any questions about the podcast, or if you'd like to share any feedback, you can email us piecenter@ifas.ufl.edu. That is piecenter@ifas.ufl.edu. I want to thank everyone involved with Science by the Slice. Michaela Kandzer, Rachel Rabon, Valentina Castano, Sidney Honeycutt, Ricky Telg, Ashley McLeod-Morin and Alena Poulin. I'm Phillip Stokes. Thanks for listening to Science by the Slice.