

**Master's in Scientific, Medical and Environmental Communication, IDEC-
Universitat Pompeu Fabra**

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Abstract

The Master's in Scientific, Medical and Environmental Communication, MCC (*Máster en Comunicación Científica, Médica y Ambiental*) from IDEC-Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona, Spain) was offered for its first time in 1995, being the first of this type in Spain. In February 2015, this master program will celebrate its 20th edition. Apart from the modality “face to face”, since 2013 UPF also offers an online modality of this master program (in October 2014 it will start its second edition). UPF is a Spanish public university. More than 500 people have coursed this master degree, most of them thanks to a partial scholarship from *Fundación La Caixa* (the largest charitable foundation in Spain, created by Caixa Bank). MCC is a professional master program. Participants, that come from different backgrounds (scientists, journalists, medical doctors, public relations, and others), at the end of this program are ready to become excellent professionals and work in different fields: science journalism, science museology, institutional science communication, science communication through new formats, etc.

An answer to a demand

Historically, Spain has produced great writers, philosophers and artists, but – with some exceptions - few scientists of international renown. There are some periods of relative glory of science (as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the rise of nautical science, and the “Silver Age” of science, during late nineteenth and early twentieth century) but some large periods are not very productive in this field. The Civil War and a 40-year dictatorship repressed the previous efforts of intellectuals and isolated Spain from other European countries and the world.

It was not until the late 70s and 80s that there was a real modernization of the country, and with it, a great change in the Spanish science and technology system. From then and until now, the evolution of the Spanish scientific system was speeded up and with it, the public interest in those subjects. During the 80s and 90s traditional mass media showed an increased interest in this subject (firsts scientific popular magazines, as well as specialized sections in newspapers and TV appeared during these decades). It was also during this period that some science museums were created. The 90s and the first decade of the 21st century were characterized by the creation of large scientific infrastructures and a greater effort to improve research internationalisation. New movements in the field of science communication appeared in this period: the incorporation of science communicators in press offices (of universities, hospitals, research centres, etc.), the creation of departments devoted to the promotion of scientific culture in regional and national administrations and, finally, the new profiles in science communication derived from the expansion of internet and ICTs.

Because of all these movements, at the beginning of the 90s a new profession became more and more necessary: the scientific communicator. A scientific communicator in a very broad sense: science journalist, public relations, webmaster, museologist, writer, etc. A professional with an important responsibility: to help society to be informed about science and technology but also to be heard by politicians, business representatives and decision makers.

The Master's in Scientific, Medical and Environmental Communication (MCC), from IDEC-Universitat Pompeu Fabra, appeared in a natural way as an answer to this demand. It was offered for its first time in 1995 (almost 20 years ago), being the first of

this type in Spain. MCC outlines the key aspects of the communication of knowledge (how it is generated, transformed and shared), offering also a deep view of the relationship between science and society. The program has an eminently practical approach and ends with an in-house work placement in media, museums, businesses or institutions involved in the sector.

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Program

The Master's in Scientific, Medical and Environmental Communication is updated every year according to social and scientific developments, and the transformations that take place within the communications system. Despite this adaptability, MCC has the following basic program:

Module I. Scientific Communication

The context of scientific communication

Scientific journals

Science centres and museums

Science in mass media, traditional and new media

The future of scientific communication

Workshops: writing, new formats, radio, video, discourse analysis, scientific museology.

Module II. Medical communication

Medicine and society

Medicine and health in the media

From research to practice

Public health and communication

Drugs: development, policies and communication

Communication techniques and analysis

Module III. Environmental communication

Historical development of the concept of environment

Environmental communication: a multidisciplinary approach

Sources of information for environmental communication

Environmental trends

Public perception of environmental problems

Teaching staff and students

Vladimir de Semir and Gema Revuelta are, respectively, the director and deputy director of this Master's Degree. Emma Cots is the coordinator. Apart of the direction team, more than 30 teachers (academics and professionals) from different disciplines cover the specific areas of the program.

Students also come from diverse disciplines: biology (37%), journalism (28%), physics and chemistry (13%), health sciences (8%), engineering and biotechnology (5%), humanities and social sciences (4%), environmental sciences (3%) and other (2%).

Some experiences from students:

- *"The IDEC-Universitat Pompeu Fabra Master in Scientific Communication allowed me to discover a whole new world. I'm a biologist and I had just defended my doctoral thesis when I decided to head in a different professional direction. I left the field of research and moved into another field, one that is no easier but one that, for me, is much more rewarding: scientific communication. During the course of the Master, I not only learned about the most important professionals on the Spanish scene, but also about many international figures. I also learned the*

ABC's of writing, radio and documentaries within the context of scientific dissemination. And, last but not least, I had the opportunity to share everything I learned with the people who would become my fellow professionals— people with great training and thirst for knowledge from whom I never tire of learning."

Marta Palomo. Free-lance / OCC. Class of 2011

- *In my case, the Master in Scientific, Medical and Environmental Communication was the perfect addition to a degree in Biology. It allowed me to learn about the world of scientific communication: who works in the field, through which institutions and platforms, the tools they use, where funding comes from, etc. The classes, the professionals I met and the internship I did encouraged me, to start up my own business along with two of my classmates: a multimedia production company specialising in scientific communication.* **Nahia Barbería.** Formas naturales. Class of 2010
- *After six years working in research and teaching and with a doctorate in Molecular Biology under my belt, I decided to go for what had always interested me. Today, thanks to the master's, I have turned my passion for disseminating science into my job, closing the door to the laboratory to instead turn to society. I love it!* **María Escrivá Izquierdo, PhD, MSc.** Corporate image and scientific communication. Fundació Pasqual Maragall. Class of 2009
- *For me, the master's meant a change in the direction of what I was looking for in my career; until then I had been focused on a very specialised line of research. Doing the course opened the door to a profession that allows me to have a broader perspective of scientific knowledge, to learn about its key players and to communicate this to others.* **Octavi Planells.** Biologist and writer for the production company of the programme Redes. Class of 2008.