

Engaging the public on climate change: A Harvard Radcliffe experience

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Climate change has emerged as the defining issue of the century with far-reaching impacts on almost every aspect of life on Earth. Geoscientists, especially geochemists, can and should play a critical role in reaching out to disseminate critical and factual information, to guide and advise policymakers, and to motivate swift societal responses in combating this unprecedented global crisis. The nature of climate change science complicated by politically motivated disinformation makes implementation and progression of education and outreach activities challenging. Using an ongoing program conducted through the Harvard Radcliffe Institute, we illustrate the design and practice of climate change engagement by bringing together key stakeholders and drawing on expertise from a diverse interdisciplinary network.

The Harvard Radcliffe Institute program intentionally brings together scholars from a wide range of relevant fields to examine key socially relevant issues. Through its climate change initiative, the program creates an interdisciplinary intellectual environment to develop innovative solutions and communication strategies to address climate related issues on both global and local scales. With involvement of faculty and students from both Harvard and Bryant universities, we reached out and engaged with various social constituents far beyond sciences, including scholars, educators, writers, artists, business practitioners, and key constituents of higher education.

Through interactive discussions, we share our successful experience as well as lessons learned from our outreach activities, including interviewing climate change education leaders, developing field-based experiential learning programs for minority and women-identified students, networking with business leaders from emerging de-carbonization industries, and engaging environmental writers, artists, and media. We found that as witnessing scientists, we discuss the issue from the strength of trusted authorities. Connecting the latest scientific results with localized pressing issues in the community would help facilitate open dialogues and lead to wider collaborations for practical solutions. Student involvement not only enriches their educational experience but provide an opportunity to bridge their classroom learning with real-world actions. “Climate change for all” not only facilitates interdisciplinary collaborations to educate the next generation but also offers geoscientists a unique opportunity to contribute their expertise to help society in facing this monumental challenge for humanity.