

**Fall 2016 Campus Sustainability Grant Proposal**  
Certified Interpretive Guide Trainer for  
Environmental Communication Spring 2017 Course

Project Leader: Curt Stager  
[cstager@paulsmiths.edu](mailto:cstager@paulsmiths.edu)  
Co-participants: Rob Carr & Kate Glenn  
Requested Amount: \$7,300

## **Project Summary**

### **Goals:**

“Climate Communication ENV399” was first offered at Paul Smith’s College in partnership with The Wild Center during the Spring of 2014 and 2015 semesters with funding provided by an NSF Grant. Dr. Curt Stager and Mr. Rob Carr co-taught the course for two years. Rob is the Exhibits and Program Manager at The Wild Center, as well as a Certified Interpretive Guide Trainer. The grant covered his salary as well as some additional funding to cover the cost of certifying all of the students in the class (\$200 each) as Certified Interpretive Guides. The NSF grant only provided enough funding to run the course for two years. The course was a tremendous success. Not only was the course one of the most highly rated classes taught at Paul Smith’s College but the students developed and delivered customized presentations on climate change for several dozen “gatekeepers” in eight sectors of the regional community in the two years the course was offered. The groups included a local fish and game club, Adirondac folk musicians, and members of the faith community. The class also led to the development of the popular Science Art and Music Festival (“SAMFest”) that we now offer at the VIC each spring ([www.samfest.org](http://www.samfest.org)). Students from the class gave their final presentations at SAMfest as well as to the targeted “gatekeeper” community groups they were designed for. We would like the opportunity to offer the class again this spring (Spring 2017) semester and are asking for funding to cover the cost of paying Rob Carr to co-teach the class. The Wild Center is so generous to allow Rob to spend a significant portion of his work week co-teaching our students in the spring semester, but we need to pay the Wild Center for his time.

### **Project Justification and Relevance:**

As the American public begins to grapple with the realities of climate change, real life decisions need to be made in virtually every sector to mitigate and adjust to the consequences of global warming and other environmental issues. Many people have yet to learn what is predicted by the scientific community and many are not yet climate-literate. There is a need for broad based dissemination of what is known. Having a way to communicate the complex science behind climate change can contribute to solving the problem of climate illiteracy prevalent in this nation today.

The story of climate disruption is often told in a global context - a scale that can be hard for audiences to comprehend. This collaborative project melds best practices in interpretation, social science research and climate science to help students (and eventually targeted groups) look at environmental issues in a local context. This strategy is both a way to see its stress on natural systems and human communities, and a location for effective science-based solutions. As our communities move from basic awareness of environmental issues to implementing mitigation and adaptive

solutions, some unlikely heroes may emerge; they are urgently needed on the front lines of this societal shift and change. This project has an impact at the community level and also help to prepare students for careers that require skills in critical thinking, problem solving and the ability to communicate to peers in the work place and others.

Paul Smith's College environmental science, environmental studies natural resource, forestry and outdoor recreation students preparing to enter the workforce are uniquely positioned to be useful interpreters of this information, as they will interface with many audiences who have the power to make meaningful change. These students have a vested interest in understanding the natural world in which they will spend their careers. Introducing students to the science behind environmental issues such as climate change and giving them tools to disseminate their learning more broadly can provide recognizable progress toward a broader understanding of this complex issue.

Paul Smith's College (PSC) offers its students a high level of experiential learning in its well-established degree programs in environmental science, forestry, natural resource management and outdoor recreation. PSC challenges its students intellectually through experimentation, research, and self-discovery. These students are a particularly good audience for the proposed course as they will be in positions of influence as they move through their post-undergraduate life. In the new course students will receive training in professional interpretation (and have the option of being certified at the successful completion of the course) by the National Association of Interpretation ([www.interpnet.com](http://www.interpnet.com))<sup>1</sup>; learn basic climate science and communication research; and create and present to targeted non-traditional audiences.

## **Methods:**

The "Environmental Communication" course helps participants look beyond the simple facts to stories and messages that will help audiences better connect to the material. By combining communication and interpretive techniques with up-to-date science, students will be able to weave threads of tangible facts and data with the intangible concepts that people connect with emotionally. The result is communication that audiences can see and feel – a fusion of data, ideas, meanings and universal concepts.

The class will engage Paul Smith's College students in developing targeted environmental communication to community gatekeepers. "Gatekeepers are professional and peer opinion leaders as well as retail and governmental organizations or bodies that influence citizen choices or manage public tax dollars"

(i.e., disaster preparedness, local food systems, building codes, eco-tourism, etc.). “However, many potential gatekeepers do not see themselves as actors playing a major role in environmental change policy. Yet these specialists define the choice environments in which citizens make important decisions affecting large groups of people. Many community segments have been neglected by climate literacy efforts, yet these same groups and individuals act as gatekeepers for implementing climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.”<sup>2</sup>

After a review of climate change effects expected in the Adirondack Park, understanding the principles of interpretation and reviewing social science recommendations on communication strategies, students worked collaboratively to develop presentations intended for specific gatekeeping audiences. **The goal is to use interpretive strategies of linking to learners’ needs and relevance, conduct research on public understanding of environmental change to initiate conversation with gatekeepers, and raise awareness of possible solutions with the outcome of a more resilient community.**

## **Project Budget and Timeline**

### **Budget:**

\$7,300

Salary for Rob Carr: Wild Center Exhibits and Interpretive Programs Manager, and Certified Interpretive Guide Trainer.

### **Budget Justification:**

The Wild Center would pay a flat fee to cover the cost of Rob Carr’s significant time and participation. In addition to co-teaching Rob will offer all of the students the option to become Certified Interpretive Guides. Rob provides expertise and leadership on a full suite of interpretive program and exhibit development activities at The Wild Center (TWC), including interpretive training, program design and delivery, exhibit planning and design, writing, graphic design, and exhibit and program evaluation. He holds a bachelor’s degree in Theater Arts from Susquehanna University and a master’s degree in Environmental Interpretation from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Rob uses his multidisciplinary background in theater, natural science, and historical, cultural and environmental interpretation to help his organization and his colleagues develop meaningful programs and exhibits that integrate science, natural history, art and

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<sup>2</sup> T. Kaskinen, O. Kuittinen, A. Neuvonen and R. Mokkaa, Demos Helsinki, Finland, *Gatekeepers changing consumers’ behaviour in energy consumption*, Future of the Consumer Society, 28-29 May 2009, Tampere, Finland

culture with solid interpretive theory. Prior to TWC, Rob directed the on-site education at the International Crane Foundation's world headquarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Rob is also a Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG), Trainer (CIT) and Host Trainer (CIHT) through the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) and the Deputy Director for the board of NAI's Region I.

**Timeline:**

Communicating Climate (ENV399) will be co-taught by Rob Carr and Dr. Curt Stager for the Spring 2017 semester. The course is taught two days a week and includes a field trip to the Wild Center. The grant would pay a flat fee to cover the cost of Rob Carr's significant time and participation. In addition to co-teaching Rob will offer all of the students the option of becoming Certified Interpretive Guides.

**Supporting Documentation**

- ENV399 Syllabus Spring 2015
- Resume for Rob Carr
- Letter of Support from Natural Sciences Department Head

