

December 9, 2021

Stony Brook University
100 Nicolls Rd
Stony Brook, NY 11794

Dear Search Committee:

I am applying for the position of Assistant Professor in Climate Communication at Stony Brook University. I am currently an Assistant Professor of Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies at the University of Kentucky (UK), where I am also affiliate faculty in the Environmental and Sustainability Studies and Appalachian Studies programs.

My research focuses on climate communication, environmental rhetoric, and rhetoric of science, and how they intersect with ethics, digital rhetorics, and engaged participatory research. In my current position, I have built research and teaching collaborations with geologists, horticulturalists, landscape architects, environmental educators, and sustainability professionals, while concomitantly developing a strong publication record and teaching a full load of undergraduate and graduate courses. I have also served my academic and regional communities, primarily as President of the Association for Rhetoric of Science, Technology, and Medicine and as co-founder and Director of the Kentucky Climate Consortium. To be direct, I believe my work to date has fully prepared me for the role of Assistant Professor in Climate Communication as you envision it, and I would be thrilled to bring my experience with and passion for collaboration, interdisciplinarity, engaged pedagogy, and climate action to Stony Brook University.

My published research to date largely focuses on environmental and climate communication. My 2015 co-authored multi-disciplinary literature review of climate change communication scholarship in *Technical Communication Quarterly* argues that climate change communication is a complex phenomenon best addressed by interdisciplinary research; our follow-up study of tweets about CO2 concentrations passing 400 parts-per-million demonstrated that claim, bringing together new materialism and critical technology studies with the classical rhetorical theory of *topoi*. An interest in interdisciplinarity also informed my co-editing of a special issue of *Poroi* on “Rhetorics of Resilience,” for which I co-authored an introduction reviewing the literature on “resilience” in ecology and health sciences, as well as its uptake by rhetorical theorists. Online discourse about climate change is also a sustained area of interest; my study of comments about climate change on a small-town newspaper’s website led to my article in *Rhetoric Review* on how to productively and ethically deploy the virtue of civility in conversations about climate change. A study in *Communication Design Quarterly* shows how online forum design affects the quality of discussion about climate change and recommends design changes to promote more productive climate deliberation.

These publications are largely textual studies of communication, written and published while I was developing long-term engaged partnerships from which I am just now beginning to publish. When I began as faculty at UK in 2016, I devoted myself to building networks on campus and in the broader community to seed and cultivate collaborative opportunities. I theorized this kind of network-building in my 2017 article on “engaged” rhetoric of science, technology, engineering, and medicine in *Poroi*, in which I argued that there are strategic, ethical, and onto-epistemological reasons for doing engaged research with scientists and other expert communities. My work since 2017 has borne this out; my research is better funded, more insightfully planned, and wider-reaching as a result of deliberately pursuing interdisciplinary engaged collaboration. For example, I lead an ongoing collaboration with The Arboretum, The State Botanical Garden of Kentucky, for which I serve on The Arboretum’s Interpretive Planning Committee. I also secured a grant from the University of Kentucky Office of the Vice President for Research to conduct a large-scale survey of Arboretum visitors’ values and attitudes, based on which I co-authored a recommendation report for use in ongoing interpretive planning and have presented on this work at an international conference.

Two of my other interdisciplinary engaged collaborations have concluded active data collection, and our teams are now preparing findings for publication. The first of these two is a collaboration funded by the Kentucky Water Resources Research Institute with a colleague in bioengineering and agriculture, in which we used interviews and surveys to assess Kentuckians’ awareness of climate and water resource issues and develop training materials to help extension professionals communicate about water resources and climate adaptation. I presented on this project at the 2019 National Communication Association conference. My multi-year research partnership with Dr. William Haneberg, the Director of the Kentucky Geological Survey (KGS) has been supported by a \$50,000 grant from the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s Standing Committee on Advancing Science Communication, which funded our collaborative research with a community in eastern Kentucky. To develop an evidence-based communications strategy for the KGS, we identified stakeholder needs and tested communication strategies, using a mixed-methods human-centered design approach, including questionnaires, photovoice, journaling, interviews, and user experience testing. Based on our findings, we are applying for an NSF Geohazards Centers grant, which will support a follow-up study on communicating with Kentuckians about natural hazards and their exacerbation by climate change. We presented on this work at the 2020 and 2021 American Geophysical Union conferences, and our work has also been covered in public media outlets; we are currently preparing a manuscript for submission to *Science Communication*.

I have explored these research interests in my teaching, which has included upper-level technical communication and rhetoric courses, service courses on communication in the writing and social sciences, and graduate courses in sustainability and technical communication. To support students as they prepare to be critically engaged participants in the workplace and the public sphere, I design my courses to connect theory and practice. For example, I have taught three iterations of WRD 406 Advanced Technical Communication in collaboration with the Kentucky state Division for Air Quality (DAQ); in these courses, students read communication scholarship, then design both public-facing and internal communications. I recently co-authored a forthcoming book chapter with Roberta Burnes, my partner at the DAQ, on our multi-year partnership. Service-learning and collaborative writing also

provide avenues for students to develop an understanding of communication as a tool for building and negotiating shared realities, whether in the workplace or the broader polity. For example, in WRD 401 Rhetoric, Environmentalism, and Climate Change, the entire class—including me—contributed content to a shared Instagram account in response to the prompt “What is the environment?” As our contributions shifted in response to what we were reading and discussing, the shared set of photographs evolved into a collaborative visual definition of “the environment.” Throughout such projects, I provide explicit instruction on project management, opportunities for reflection, and insights from my own collaborations; students often report these are the best team experiences they’ve had because of the attention we give to team dynamics and the purposes behind collaboration.

The centrality of collaboration and engagement to my research and teaching extends to my service, which often draws on my expertise in climate and environmental communication. This is perhaps most apparent in my role as co-founder and Director of the Kentucky Climate Consortium (KYCC). The KYCC is a network of climate researchers and instructors in Kentucky higher education, and it supports collaboration and communication about climate issues in Kentucky. Since I co-founded the KYCC in August 2018 with Dr. Carmen Agouridis from the UK College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment, the KYCC has enrolled over 45 members from multiple colleges and universities state-wide. Under my leadership as Director since 2019, the KYCC has sponsored a monthly “Climate Chat” series, secured funding for an intern and grant writer, solicited pro bono logo development by a regional creative agency, and met with other statewide groups to learn about their internal structures, budgeting, and outreach. More recently, as the Chair of the Communicating the Plan Work Group for UK’s Emissions Reduction Plan Task Force, I led the development of short- and long-term communication plans for publicizing emissions reduction efforts and promoting behavior changes that will contribute to climate change mitigation by UK community members. In service of my academic community, I recently concluded my term as President of the Association for Rhetoric of Science, Technology, and Medicine (ARSTM); during my tenure, we held the most-attended preconference in ARSTM history at the National Communication Association conference in 2020, grew our budget threefold, and maintained membership levels despite the COVID-19 pandemic complicating recruitment and engagement efforts.

My research, teaching, and service all strive to connect communication studies with people who can put rhetorical and ethical insights to work improving themselves, their organizations, their communities, and the environment. It would be an honor to sharpen my focus on climate and continue doing this work at Stony Brook University in collaboration with the faculty and staff at the Alda Center, SoCJ, and SoMAS.

I am available via phone (REDACTED) and email (lauren.cagle@uky.edu) to answer any questions or schedule an interview. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,


Dr. Lauren E. Cagle