



*The communication workshop was developed as part of Gradvantage, a new initiative that aims to prepare UC San Diego graduate students for careers outside of academia.*

## Grad Students Practice the Art and Science of Communication

For Matt Leslie, a doctoral student at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, science communication is a passion. Leslie studies whales and dolphins, trying to understand species diversity and how to improve conservation efforts for these populations.

“I love teaching—whether in a classroom or just informally talking about my research,” he said. “I also know how important it is to be able to communicate what I do.”

When he heard about a new four-day, immersive communication workshop for UC San Diego graduate students, Leslie didn't hesitate to sign up. What he got was an experience that went beyond the average public speaking training.

Leslie was one of 30 graduate students to participate in [Inspiring Research: Creative Strategies for Communication](#). The pilot workshop was developed by UC San Diego theatre professors Lisa Porter and Kim Rubinstein as part of [Gradvantage](#), a new initiative that aims to prepare UC San Diego graduate students for careers outside of academia.

Held Sept. 8-11, the four-day workshop included concepts from Porter and Rubinstein's "Cultivating the Creative Mind" curriculum, which draws on both neuroscience and theatre disciplines to investigate and ignite the creative mind. The workshop also incorporated techniques from the Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science at Stony Brook University in New York. One of the key goals was to teach students to authentically and spontaneously engage with an audience about their research—rather than simply delivering a memorized explanation of their work.



*Students participated in mock interviews, improv exercises and more as part of the workshop.*

"We come from the perspective of studying human behavior," said Rubinstein. "Effective communication is much more than a great PowerPoint presentation and distilling your research into a clear message. To really connect with the hearts and minds of your audience, you have to speak from the spark where it all began."

Through exercises ranging from improv to mock interviews, students learned the science and art of communication. They discussed how the brain processes creative input and how one's physical presence—including posture and gesture—can affect the energy in a room. They learned how to read an audience and engage. They also learned how to use storytelling, metaphor and their own personal style and experience when sharing their work.

The final exercise was an on-camera interview, in the style of a TV morning show appearance, in which students had four minutes to talk with a reporter about their work. According to Porter, the difference between that last hour of the workshop and the first was stunning.

"As a scientist, my mind is almost always in the analytical world," said Leslie. "It was really refreshing to get into that creative space. The intersection of art and science really set this program apart. The skills we learned over those four days are fundamental to any job."

The communication workshop is just one of the professional development resources offered through Gradvantage. Launched in August of this year, Gradvantage helps UC San Diego master's and doctoral students develop the leadership, communication and teamwork skills necessary to excel in

the 21st century workplace—particularly in careers outside of academia.

The initiative is a partnership of several UC San Diego entities—including the Graduate Division, Graduate Student Association, Career Services Center, Office of Research Affairs and UC San Diego Extension—and is supported through the Chancellor’s Strategic Plan.

“We developed Gradvantage with input from industry leaders in San Diego and from our graduate student community,” said Steve Cassedy, acting dean of the UC San Diego Graduate Division. “This program will help us to serve our students better and to train the kind of academic and private sector leaders that our society needs.”



*Graduate students from across academic disciplines participated in an immersive, four-day workshop titled Inspiring Research: Creative Strategies for Communication.*

In addition to the communication workshop, the Gradvantage initiative includes three core components:

- Monthly Career Nights – Featuring industry leaders speaking about job opportunities in their respective fields. The [next career night](#) will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. on Oct. 14 and will feature UC San Diego alumni Alex Tronchin-James and Jake Klamka, founders of Insight Data.
- UC San Diego Extension Certificate – Focusing on leadership, teamwork and project management skills in a non-academic setting. The new [Certificate in Leadership and Teamwork](#) launched Sept. 29 with 55 students enrolled.
- Career Services – Expanding its [career transition workshop series](#) to help doctoral students who are undecided about pursuing an academic career. This five-session series is held once per quarter; registration opens, in Port Triton, during the first week of each quarter.

Graduate students and postdoctoral scholars can also utilize Gradvantage as a one-stop resource for information about professional development opportunities on campus. For more information about the initiative and upcoming events, visit the [Gradvantage website](#) or email [gradvantage@ucsd.edu](mailto:gradvantage@ucsd.edu).

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