

Communication Profile transcript

(Episode 11)

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Interviewees: Liesbeth de Bakker (L), Eveline Meijers (E), Malika Weima (M)

[intro tune]

Welcome to the radio life-science podcast. For a behind-the-scenes look into the GSLS. Made by students and educators, for the scientists of tomorrow .

F: Well hi there my name is Franca van Heijningen and today I'm interviewing three wonderful guests of the GSLS-communication profile. On one hand we have the profile coordinator Liesbeth de Bakker, welcome.

L: Hi hi.

F: And on the other hand we have two ex-students, welcome Malika Weima and Eveline Meijers.

M: Welcome, thank you.

F: Ok let's start with some information about the profile itself. So the first question I have for you Liesbeth is: How did you end up to be the profile coordinator?

L: Well actually I kind of inherited it. When I started first in 2006 I started teaching science communication at Utrecht University and one of my colleagues said that we have this long-standing bond between our program and the Graduate School of Life Sciences (GSLS) in that we offered students for 33EC and that's actually the same amount of the minor research project an opportunity to delve into communication and education. Initially those first years it was like 10 students per year, but gradually it grew. And it's really nice to liaise with interesting research students that are interested in communication and education.

F: So how many students are in the profile right now?

L: Per year we can welcome about 25 to 30. Those are not all GSLS students but we often have, well, a students from natural sciences. That's actually quite new. But next year we will have more opportunity because they have now also made it officially part of their program. But we also have students from geosciences so it's it's really nice it's a mixed group of students.

F: Yeah really diverse I would say, nice.

L: Yes.

F: So what is the idea actually about the profile, what do students learn?

L: The c-profile is especially there for research master students who feel that a career in research in the lab is not really their ultimate goal. And they sense as they go along in their studies that they have a need to communicate and to well some also feel the need to teach to share information with other groups. Therefore we decided that the C-profile is a nice opportunity for them. We give them the opportunity to delve into communication and into informal science education. So that's all education outside of schools. For instance you can think of museums or zoo's or petting zoos in cities. And they come to us to learn more about how to share information about science in an informal way in different settings with different target audiences. The great thing is that once they find a way to me to the c-profile they often end up being very happy saying: 'yes this is really what I like and this is how I want to professionalize myself.

F: And already heard you saying something about musea and other internships, but I was wondering what elements the profile consist of? Are there also courses?

L: Yes, definitely. There's more than this one particular big internship that we offer. Of course that's the most popular part because students all want to work and learn things in practice so that's 20 EC of the 33 C profile. In addition we have three extra courses one of them is a very practical course it's called communicating science with the public. In this course the students learn how to write a popular science article of about 800 words on a science issue that's close to the heart. So it could be immunology, environmental biology, climate change, or for example sustainability. And they make in teams of four or three students a small video clip to go with that. So it's very practical learning of the practical skills of communication. And then we have a special course of three EC which is called engaging scientist with a public. It is a fully online course. This is actually on the most difficult forms of science communication that's bringing researchers and the public together and to work on something together sometimes the public or lay people have interesting information that will improve the research of researchers or they have interesting data that they can offer. Or maybe they one support and making good decisions that are relevant for their health. Then we have made a new change to the program. We used to have a compulsory course but now you can choose from four different courses as your final course for the C-profile. One of them is Issues and Theories in Science Communication which is a more theoretical course that gives you all the information about the theories and models that are useful in kind of talking to people about science and then motivate people to do certain things for instance in behavior. In addition there Designing Science Education and Communication which teaches you all about all the steps you need to take to make a good educational product for informal science education. And then we have added the course Science in Society which focuses on the dynamics between science and society and how these two interact. And the final one is Professional Skills and Identity which is actually a course that makes you focus on what's next after my master, what skills do I have, what do I still need to develop. For some students it's really nice to be able to focus on that during the C-profile.

6:02

F: And if I may then directly follow up onto this, what are the career possibilities which open up for students who completed the c-profile?

L: I think that's a very relevant but also important question. When a student asks me that before he or she starts with a C profile I always say well I think your career prospects or

your prospects for a job or about the same as if you would stay in research. Because it's quite hard to get a good PhD position as well. So it's not a huge advantage but it broadens your options. And from a study that I did a couple of years ago from all the people who did the C-profile, and that's quite a lot over 100 students now, we see that a part of them stay in research but they do a PhD and their professors all think it's great that they want to communicate because they are the ones on open days and interact with the public. They really like that, so they have the extra skill. Quite a big group end up in communication jobs for instance add a website about cancer some end up in advisory bureaus for ecology and finally what we also see is that some of them become teachers. So it's quite diverse and the most extravagant the most maybe weird outcome of a job that I found was somebody who ended up in stock trading, but then sustainable stocks for one of the big banks in the Netherlands. So somehow it opens up an awful lot of new opportunities.

F: So thank you Liesbeth for this general introduction about the profile. But now let's move to the students Malika and Eveline. Eveline, I would like to ask the first question to you.

What is your educational background and why did you decide to sign up for the C profile?

E: Yes of course I can. I just graduated from my masters called nanomaterial science so it's not from the GSLS but from natural sciences (GSNS). Just as Liesbeth said actually I found out in my major research project that the research field is a bit too slowly or maybe I am too impatient for doing research. I wanted to, it sounds so negative but maybe research is also a bit too lonely for me so like to work with more people than only like a few colleagues in the lab.

F: Yes thank you. And Malika you have a background in biology I heard. What inspired you to participate in C-profile?

M: So back in high school I already really enjoyed tutoring. In that way I found out that I really like telling people what about nature and conservation and the environment. So that's kind of why I chose to do the C-profile so that I can distribute how important it is to learn about these things.

F: Now listening for your motivation I immediately wonder: did you also get the opportunity during the C-profile to indeed distribute that knowledge?

M: Yes I did actually in my internship for Ouwehands Dierenpark, it is a zoo in The Netherlands, I created a game about endangered animals. So that the children could learn about how they live in the wild and what we humans can do to preserve them. So I really enjoyed creating a game and I also rode in the course is about people eating less meat for the environment. So yeah I really got the opportunity to do these things in the C-profile.

F: Well that sounds great Malika. And you Eveline, what did you do during your internship of 20 EC?

E: I did my internship at the Museum Museum in The Hague. And there I designed what they call a museum lesson. So primary schools go to the museum and they follow a lesson of 1-1.5 hours for 9-10 year old children. And I designed a lesson about air and flying and how airplanes work. And I tried to make it both educational and playful, I think that's important.

F: And now looking back, what would be the most memorable experience?

E: I still remember the afternoon, the museum was already closed, but I still wanted to test the lesson that I made so I randomly found four children that wanted to participate and it was amazing. It was for children that you don't know yet that go wild on some experiments that you made.

F: Well that's what I indeed would call a memorable experience! And now maybe yeah also looking back to the courses, which elements did you like the most about it Eveline?

E: I followed the designing education and communication course and there was one big project to design a lesson about well anything. So my group and me designed a lesson for the tutor in high schools about sex. We design sex lessons, it was so cool it had a lot of elements to make 14-year-olds feel comfortable to talk about that. But also trying to teach them something, but also not be too teachy, also let them have their own opinion and make sure that that is OK. There were a lot of layers in only one project.

F: Interesting to hear. And for you Malike, what were the most memorable experiences of the courses you followed?

M: I really enjoyed communicating science with the public because you had to make a video with a group and you had to make these social media posts. And I really like to be creative and also it was nice to be able to work in a group in these strange times that we had to work from home a lot. So yeah I thought it was really fun to really create something while keeping your target audience in mind. Like how am I going to make an interesting post or video for them, I really enjoyed that. Yeah I think that was my favorite course. I also did issues and theories in science communication. And I really thought it was useful to have that background in mind, yeah the theories behind it in science communication. So I think that those were my most valuable course experiences.

F: You also mentioned something about like of course we are living in corona pandemic and you have to work more from home. This that affect your experiences with the profile?

M: I think especially it affected my experience with my internship. This because I sometimes got to go to Ouwehands Dierenpark and I could work at the office but not really frequently of course. And I was really happy that I could still do the internship from home but I didn't really get to experience the vibe of the organization of my internship. So that was sadly the case, but I still really enjoyed the assignments that I was doing for them. And I think we really handled it well all the online things and all the meetings. We really felt like a group with everyone that was doing the communication profile. And luckily we had some real life meetings and that was really helpful. It was good to hear from everyone what they were doing and see what they were struggling with. And you could you know exchange ideas, I think we handled it well.

F: Besides the challenges which Malika already mentioned. Eveline, what was the most challenging for you within the program?

E: Yeah I think reading a new type of literature. So the academic papers that you have to read in the course are so different from the academic papers that I was used to in chemistry. And they were much more wordy and there's a lot of statistics in it.

F: Well good to know! I wasn't aware of the difference either. Now I would like to move on to a more general question. Malika, whas the program as expected?

M: Yeah to me it was. Yeah I think the introduction was quite clear. Of course I had to find out how to schedule all the courses next to my internship and that's what you really had to figure out in the beginning. Like what do I have to do, when do I have to finish up all my stuff. But yeah it was as I expected it to be actually. It was both really practical due to the internship and theoretical and I really like that combination.

F: Does the same account for you Eveline?

E: Well I didn't really know what to expect beforehand. But I can say that the courses that I followed were absolutely different than the courses that I used to follow. Also because I didn't follow the issues of theories. So I did two very practical courses next to the internship and that was very different from just sitting in a classroom listening to the teacher and then making some exercises.

F: It's been a few months since you finished the profile but when you look back at it what was the most inspiring thing you learned or experienced Malika?

M: Yeah I think the most inspiring thing was the general feeling when we were discussing things with the group that everyone was passionate about communication. And everyone was very helpful to each other, thinking with each other like oh how can you maybe deal with this issue that you. That was really inspiring to me like the community feeling I think. And seeing that with so many different topics that people were working on everyone created their own whole product and it was really really nice to see.

F: So despite that all of the students were working on different topics you were still able to collaborate in a sense.

M: Yeah yeah I really got that feeling and it was really I really enjoyed that.

F: And Eveline, what was the most inspiring thing about a profile for you?

E: Yeah well I think like Malika already talked about that a little bit but the broad variety in options and educational options I think that was what surprised me most. I was attracted to the educational part a little bit more than the communication part. But it also has a lot of overlap of course. There's so much to do when you look at the 12 students that we had last year. Well Malika worked in a zoo and someone made a folder for the Alzheimer's patients. And that is so apart worlds within the same discipline I think that surprised me the most.

L: Would there be an opportunity for me to ask a question to my two former students?

F: Yes of course.

L: Ok, I was wondering, Malika can go first in answering this, you finished of the C-profile in February and now you are for continuing most probably with your studies or maybe you're orienting yourself in a career. I would first like to know what are you doing now and second is there anything that you already concretely have taken along from the C-profile and what you are doing now.

M: So yeah actually I am doing my major internship now I am not doing it at Naturalis Biodiversity Center. And we are doing research to find out what kind of insect by diversity lives within the nest of the European mole. So it's quite an ecological so it's really different it's really yeah just back to research. But my supervisor from Naturalis he is really into communication. Sometimes he is at talk shows and things like that. So through him I can see

how you can communicate as a researcher find your way to communication as well. So that's really really nice to see. Not really specifically anything within my own internship that I can use the communication for. But I do intend to after I finish this Master to do another year to get my teachers degree. That's something that the communication profile inspired in me that I would like to find out if I maybe would like to be a teacher.

L: Yes great thank you very much. Eveline?

E: Actually when the C- profile ended in February I also graduated immediately as the last part of my masters. And I do work now at the 'Ontdekhal' it is called.

F: so 'discovery hall'

E: Yeah sort of a discovery lab. So we just opened in Utrecht but it already has a big larger sister in Eindhoven. And we like to make children of primary school age enthusiastic about technique and technology, by using stories and by using a lot of practical workshops. So that has nothing to do with chemistry anymore but a lot with informal science education that I really really took with me from the C-profile. And then in September I will also start the educational master so go from my teachers degree just like Malika.

F: Two weeks ago cycled alongside the Discovery lab

E: Nice!

F: So now we heard a lot about your experiences during the communication profile but I would also like to ask more like critical question. Why would you not recommend to sign up for the C- profile? What are the cons? Starting with Malika.

M: Yes so I thought maybe if you are really into research and the details of research it can be difficult to communicate this to a certain target audience. So if you really like the hard science behind your field of interest maybe communication can be difficult. Yeah I think that maybe you should just stick to the research but I think if you have a passion for communicating about your field of interest than yeah I would recommend it.

F: Do you have anything to add to that Eveline?

E: I don't really think so, I think that you just suit you as a person actually and also the structure of the courses and also the internship can be quite open or freely and you do have to like that. So it's not what I said it's not the strict thing I was used to in school or in my bachelor or my masters but it's more of an open structure in how you are working and you do it like that.

L: If I may add to that as your teacher and coordinator. I think the issue that Eveline just raised is that it is a very busy and very intense C-profile that actually asks from you that you take charge and you take responsibility for your own learning process. We give you all the opportunity in terms of development that you could wish, I hope. But then it's up to you to make the decisions on what to focus on, what is the ideal internship for you, how can I turn the contents of the courses in such a way that it fits my interests so I can dedicate all my energy and all my hours because it's a lot of hours but because all the students love it so much they do it but it's a lot of work. And it has been very difficult for the students now in lockdown as we dedicate all the time when you're just on your own. So I'm hoping that after this summer everything will be OK again and we can really see and interact with each other again. But it demands a lot from you and you need to have that love of communication and education otherwise the C-profile is not your thing and it will be hard for you to get through it.

F: Well thank you for sharing this. And to end with a final remark from the students: why do you recommend to sign up? Malika?

M: So I would recommend to sign if you're ready to learn something new. Because it is really different than the typical things we learn during our scientific bachelors. There are totally new approaches as Eveline mentioned already. The papers are really different, it is just a different field. And I really enjoyed exploring something new other than that the scientific research courses and internships I have done so far. So yeah I think that would be my answer.

F: And Eveline?

M: Yeah I think the answer on this question is the same as on the previous question. It should just suit you as Liesbeth said. You do have to like it or love it to either communicate about science or to educate about science. And if you do then it is wonderful.

F: So maybe it's also good to end with the practicalities. Liesbeth, where can students sign up?

L: How it always goes, and I still like that way, is that students sent me an email. On the graduate school of life science website there is a full page giving you all the details about the c-profile and giving you my email address and it's a bit long so I won't spell it out here. But how it usually goes is people send me an email and I will give them extra information and a link to the registration form with all additional information. Then they enlist and then will start together looking for the ideal internship for this particular student. Looking for this ideal internship often takes a bit of time so if you want to start in September you should register now. We're now actually living at the end of April so we have a deadline but it's not a hard deadline but it's just a deadline that is there to give us enough time to organize a good internship. So deadline beginning of May and then start in September. If you want to start in the second semester, so in February, then register by the end of October at the latest so we can do the trajectory together for a good start in February.

F: I would like to thank students Malika and Eveline for sharing their experiences during the C-profile. Moreover I would like to thank the profile coordinator Liesbeth de Bakker for giving us more insights in the profile itself. This episode was brought to you by Franca van Heijningen of the Radio Life Sciences team. Keep an eye out for the episodes of the other GSLS profile as well. See you next time!

[Outro tune]