

Impact Round-Up 15th March: The Cosmos of science communication, rallying for the humanities, and #itooamoxford.

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/03/15/impact-round-up-15th-march/

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Managing Editor **Sierra Williams** presents a round-up of popular stories from around the web on higher education, academic impact, and trends in scholarly communication.

Inspired by the ‘I, too, am Harvard’ initiative, students organised an ‘[I, too, am Oxford’ project tumblr](#) collating together thoughts this week seeking to raise awareness about how students of colour are made to feel different in the wider institutional setting. The initiative is calling for wider discussion on race to be taken seriously and for real institutional change to occur. Responses are also being shared on twitter [#itooamoxford](#).

35 years since the popular science communicator Carl Sagan debuted his Cosmos television series, a revamped version is set to reach mass audiences with host Neil deGrasse Tyson hoping to kick start a global conversation about the wonders of science. But Bob Lalasz at Cool Green Science highlights the changes that have occurred in science communication over the recent decades and wonders, [Will ‘Cosmos’ Miss the Big Bang in Science Communications?](#) Discussing research by [Suzanne de Cheveigné \(1996\)](#) on the public understanding of science, Lalasz writes,

our experience of science in school shapes how receptive we are to absorbing science when presented on television – and that three out of the four possible readings are unfavorable...That’s not to say that “Cosmos” can’t be valuable, especially in inspiring younger generations to become interested in science and the natural world. But science on TV itself and the pedagogical approach Tyson seems to be taking might present serious barriers for many people. [\[read more\]](#)



Christ Church Hall, Oxford. Photograph by Mike Peel. (CC-BY)

Elsewhere in the Chronicle Vitae, a blog titled [A Rallying Cry for the Humanities](#), Kelly J. Baker argues that researchers could learn more from the techniques of mass media science communicators in underlining the relevance of the humanities and outlines strategies for reaching wider audiences:

Look, no matter the state of the humanities, humanists have a decision to make: Do we engage with the larger public and make a case for the importance of what we do? Or do we continue to run around and warn one another that the sky is falling? I hope humanities scholars will embrace the former option and follow the example of Neil deGrasse Tyson and other science communicators. Let’s create a form of humanities communication that counters the pernicious image of stuffy irrelevance and armchair analysis. [\[read more\]](#)

Two pieces on Twitter are worth a mention this week – [What I Say When My Colleagues Ask Me If They Should Be On Twitter](#) by Hope Jahren presents five reasons why Twitter is a useful medium for the academic profession:

meeting people, saying something, expressing rage, setting an example, experimenting with your identity. Also of social media interest, [How Twitter shapes public opinion](#) summarises the research by [Xiong and Liu \(2014\)](#) and appeared this week in [ScienceDaily](#)'s Featured Research column:

Xiong and Liu discovered that public opinion on Twitter often evolves rapidly and levels off quickly into an ordered state in which one opinion remains dominant. In true social media form, this consensus is often driven by the endorsements of larger and larger groups, which tend to have the most influence... Since public opinion levels off and evolves into an ordered state within a short time, small advantages of one opinion in the early stages can turn into a bigger advantage during the evolution of public opinion, Xiong said. "Once public opinion stabilizes, it's difficult to change," he added. The work also revealed that Twitter users overall are more likely to work to change the opinions of others than to admit to changes of their own. [\[read more\]](#)

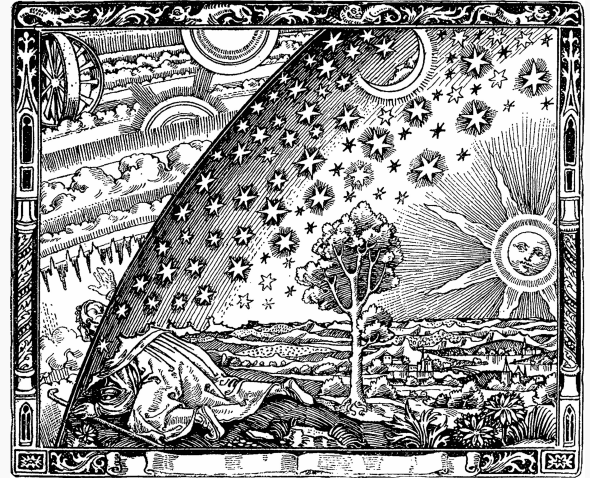


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And the final recommended read for this week is from the blog PubPeer, [Science self-corrects – instantly](#) which recounts the recent flaws in the peer review process for two high-profile Nature articles, emphasising the increasingly vital role of post-publication peer review:

We see that post-publication peer review easily outperformed even the most careful reviewing in the best journal. The papers' comment threads on PubPeer have attracted some 40000 viewers. It's hardly suprising they caught issues that three overworked referees and a couple of editors did not. [\[read more\]](#)

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