

#ComSciConMI19

August 17-18, 2019 ◇ Michigan State University ◇ East Lansing, MI

# ComSciCon Michigan 2019



 @ComSciConMI

 michigan@comscicon.org

 [tinyurl.com/csc-mich-19](https://tinyurl.com/csc-mich-19)

*In partnership with:*



**MSU SCICOMM**

Michigan State University's Science  
Communication

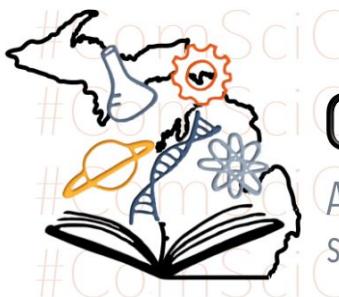


# ComSciCon-Michigan 2019

A science communication workshop for graduate students in Michigan

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# ComSciCon-Michigan 2019

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## Letter from the Organizing Committee

Dear sponsors and supporters,

This year marked Michigan's second annual Communicating Science Conference (ComSciCon), and we are so thankful for new and ongoing support, encouragement, and enthusiasm we received.

Michigan has an investment in science communication, with multiple resources and programs spanning the state. Many of these resources cater to graduate students in the sciences. This investment was further clear in the generous financial support we received from organizations and university departments at both Michigan State University and the University of Michigan along with the excitement from our talented speakers, workshop leaders, and editors, wonderful volunteers, and best of all our impressive attendees. This event would not have been possible without the generosity of our sponsors.

This year, we received over 100 applications for 60 spots, which made the selection process very competitive. This is evidence that there is a great demand for the skills that conferences like ComSciCon can offer to the local community. We hope that Michigan's workshop will continue to serve as a resource for more people in and around the Midwest.

We would also like to thank our invited workshop leaders, their affiliated organizations, our expert editors, and speakers, including our keynote speaker Dr. Samantha Yammie. We thank our local attendees who shared their living spaces with traveling attendees for the two-day event. As a workshop designed for graduate students by graduate students, many thanks to the organizing team are also in order.

The following pages include information about our program, feedback from attendees, attendee demographics, along with funding and budget information. We hope that this report provides a clear snapshot of ComSciCon-Michigan 2019, of its success, and of its continued impact on the local science communication community.

Please don't hesitate to email [michigan@comscicon.org](mailto:michigan@comscicon.org) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,  
The ComSciCon-Michigan 2019 Organizing Committee



## 2019 Organizing Committee



From left to right:

**Daniel Puentes**, Physics, MSU

**Attabey Rodríguez Benítez**, Program in Chemical Biology, UM

**Sarah Kearns**, Chemical Biology, UM

**Sara Hugentobler**, Integrative Biology, MSU

**Dr. Stephanie Hamilton**, Physics, UM (**Chair**)

**Jessica Chen**, Neuroscience, UM (**Co-chair**)

**David Ferland**, Pharmacology & Toxicology, MSU

**Alyssa Preiser**, Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, MSU

**Zoe Hansen**, Microbiology & Molecular Genetics, MSU

**Chelsie Boodoo**, Biomedical Engineering, MSU

**Ti'Air Riggins**, Biomedical Engineering, MSU

**Kristina Lenn** (not pictured), Chemistry, UM

**Ellen KW Brennan** (not pictured), Neuroscience, UM



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## Executive Summary

ComSciCon-Michigan is a local instance of the national ComSciCon workshop series that provides science communication training and is run by and for graduate students. Our goal is to bring resources from around the state together to train the future generation of communicators. By engaging diverse audiences, we hope their skills will bring change to our communities. The second annual workshop brought together 60 graduate students and postdoctoral fellows from around the Midwest.

<b>Invited Experts</b> This year, we were honored to have 23 incredible panelists, workshop leaders, and editors. Our panel topics focused on careers in science communication, ethics, and creative science communication. The successful break-out sessions gave attendees hands-on experiences in websites & portfolios, podcasts & videos, journalism, illustration & graphics, science policy & advocacy, and data visualization.	<b>Write-A-Thon</b> A key portion of any ComSciCon workshop is the writing workshop. Before coming to the conference, attendees were asked to write an article regarding a science topic. They received feedback from peers prior to the conference and met in small groups with an expert editor on the first day.
<b>Keynote</b> Our keynote speaker was <a href="#">Dr. Samantha Yammie</a> from the University of Toronto. She created an interactive keynote lecture on how to use social media as a tool for science communication.	

## Making Inclusivity a Priority

This year, we undertook a number of measures to ensure our conference was as inclusive as possible. While there is *always* room for improvement, we are proud of the items and resources we were able to provide. These included:

- Gender-neutral restrooms
- Wheelchair-accessible venue
- Quiet room and lactation room
- Travel and rooming reimbursements
- Pronoun stickers
- Indigenous land acknowledgment
- Use of microphones at ALL times
- “Traffic light” interaction stickers
- Real-time closed captioning with Google Slides
- Alt text on every image
- Color-blind-friendly figures
- Use of off-white backgrounds for slides
- Accommodations for dietary restrictions
- Wide variety of food options

In our inclusivity planning efforts, we found [York University's Inclusion Lens](#) webpage to be very helpful.

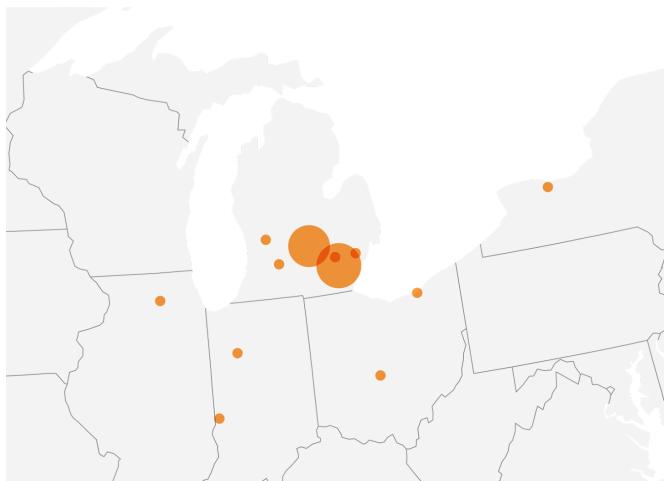


# ComSciCon-Michigan 2019

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# Attendee Demographics

We were pleased to have over 100 applications for the 60 slots available. Admittance was competitive and attendees were highly qualified and motivated to become science communication experts. Attendees came from nine institutions spanning five states.



- University of Michigan (27)
- Michigan State University (26)
- Wayne State University (1)
- University of Rochester (1)
- Ohio State University (1)
- Indiana State University (1)
- Yale University (1)
- Northern Illinois University (1)
- Van Andel Institute (1)

The majority of our attendees are pursuing their Ph.D. degree (76.7%), but we also had Master's (11.7%), and Postdoctoral (11.7%) attendees.

Many disciplines were represented (right), with several participants falling into more than one category. Needless to say, we had a wide variety of expertise.

About 46% of participants had less than three years of science communication experience. We were excited to be able to provide resources and training for the future of Michigan science communication!





## Keynote Address

**Dr. Samantha Yammie**, a neuroscientist, science communicator, and digital content creator from the University of Toronto gave an exciting, informative, and interactive keynote lecture this year. She has co-authored a crowd-funded research study exploring the effects that scientists sharing selfies on Instagram can have on public perceptions of scientists ([Jarreau et al. 2019](#)). She started the lecture with “laughing yoga,” talked about the importance of diversity in science communicators, and gave an overview of the different types of social media out there. Finally, she led participants through a worksheet to develop their social media persona and objectives, allowing participants to walk away with a concrete method in mind for science communication and the skills to do so.



*“If you feel like you don't belong in STEM, you are who we need communicating it.”*  
— Samantha Yammie



## Panels

### Careers in Science Communication

Organized by Ellen Brennan & Zoe Hansen

**Dr. Elyse Aurbach**, Public Engagement Lead, Office of Academic Innovation (University of Michigan)

**Dr. Ryan Bixenmann**, Director MSU PhD Career Services (Michigan State University)

**Dr. Shoba Subramanian**, Director of Curriculum and Education Initiatives (University of Michigan)

Our Career Panelists were chosen to share their insights about science communication, how they have used SciComm in their current and past positions, and how to effectively develop, practice, and apply science communication skills. Audience members inquired about the tradeoffs between completing research while also trying to enhance their experiences in science communication. Each of our panelists offered valuable insight and encouraged participants to advocate for themselves and their SciComm goals despite hesitancy from their advisors. They especially emphasized the growing importance of science communication among fields and that SciComm skills are translatable across a wide variety of careers.



Dr. Elyse Aurbach



Dr. Ryan Bixenmann



Dr. Shoba Subramanian



*"I found it particularly impactful to hear that those on the panel still miss research, but feel the benefits of their current job outweigh their love of research."*

— 2019 attendee



## Ethics

Organized by Ti'Air Riggins & Jessica Chen

**Dr. Michael Imperiale**, Associate Vice President for Research - Policy and Compliance at Michigan

**Dr. Laura Cabrera**, Assistant Professor of Neuroethics at the Center for Ethics and Humanities

**Dan Wixted**, Community Integrated Pest Management Coordinating Council Member, NY

A group of experts were chosen based on their work within ethics as it pertains to science. Each panelist was given a minute to introduce themselves and describe what they do and where they apply ethics in their work. The audience asked many different questions concerning hot topics in research ethics, such as genetically modified organisms, pesticides, and vaccines .



Dr. Michael Imperiale



Dr. Laura Cabrera



Dan Wixted



*"It's always a good reminder that we have the responsibility to not only generate new knowledge, but to help ensure it's used responsibly."*

— 2019 attendee



## Creative Science Communication

Organized by Kristina Lenn & Sarah Kearns

**Monika Wood**, Laboratory/Classroom Services Manager (University of Michigan)

**Alison Bernstein**, Assistant Professor of Translational Neuroscience (Michigan State University)

**Dan TerAvest**, Co-Founder Our Sci, LLC

**Patrick Morgan**, Physics Education and Outreach Coordinator (Michigan State University)

These panelists were chosen based on their experience with science outreach and communication via demonstrations and blogs. Each panelist was given a minute to introduce themselves and describe their work and contributions to creative science communication. The audience engaged with many different questions regarding how to reach an audience and how to keep the creativity going with their work.



Monika Wood



Alison Bernstein



Dan TerAvest



Patrick Morgan



*“[This panel showed] how I can better integrate science communication techniques I have from other areas, a concept I hadn't really thought about before.”*

— 2019 attendee



## Breakout Sessions



### Websites & Portfolios

Elizabeth Anderson, Director of Science Communication for the Center for Research on Ingredient Safety at MSU.

Participants learned how to:

- Create, organize, curate their content
- Build a professional website
- Share their brand and message effectively

*"This session gave me tools to create my own website and made me think more about what I want my brand to represent."* — 2019 attendee

### Podcasts & Videos

Dr. Rachel Morris (left), faculty member at MSU, and Jim Monahan (right), communications coordinator for the Biomedical Laboratory Diagnostics Program at MSU.

Participants learned how to:

- Set goals for production
- Choose their medium
- Craft their message



*"The tips on video editing and preparing a podcast were incredibly helpful. They gave me lots of good ideas for my own projects."* — 2019 attendee



### Journalism for Scientists

Ian Demsky, senior writer and public relations representative at UM.

Participants learned how to:

- Translate concepts for general audience
- Build the anatomy of the story
- Have an effective interview
- Pitch & report a story, not just write one

*"I learned that Science Journalism is really difficult and an amazing job to have! It was great to put that career into perspective."* — 2019 attendee



### Illustration & Graphics

Patricia Beals, lecturer at Stamps School of Art & Design at UM.

Participants learned how to:

- Understand best practices for collaboration in illustration
- Evaluate illustration and visualization drafts
- Create rough sketches and written descriptions
- Estimate budgets and timelines for projects

*"The speaker gave a great idea how the illustration community works for scientists...It also demonstrated how a good illustration explains the science better than a thousand words." — 2019 attendee*

### Science Policy & Advocacy 101

William Dean (left), Engaging Scientists in Policy & Advocacy at UM, and Edyta Sitko (right), Union of Concerned Scientists.

Participants learned how to:

- Make science a part of government
- Present to policy makers
- Get involved at local & national levels



*"I learned more about science policy and it was fun doing a workshop breaking down how to develop policy and how to pick targets." — 2019 attendee*



### Data Visualization

Jacqui Broughton, Institutional Research at MSU.

Participants learned how to:

- Identify what is and is not data visualization
- Make images that the brain easily interprets
- Take complex information and tell a story

*"Data Visualization was an incredible workshop. I really liked how the presenter showed how to present data effectively also suggesting many tools. This workshop was so useful!" — 2019 attendee*



## Write-A-Thon

Before the conference, attendees were asked to submit a piece of writing on a science topic of their choice. Their pieces went through one round of peer revisions prior to the start of the conference. Attendees then received feedback from expert editors on the first day of the conference. Following the conference, they were encouraged to pitch their polished pieces to journals, magazines, and blogs for publication. We are grateful to the following expert editors for lending their writing expertise to the Write-a-thon!

- Ryan Bixenmann
- Elyse Aurbach
- Mark Auslander
- Shoba Subramanian
- Stephanie Hamilton
- Patrick Morgan
- Dan Wixted
- Michael Imperiali
- Sobha Ramanand
- Sarah Kearns
- Rachel Morris
- Elisabeth Anderson
- Matt Miller
- Lauren Aerni-Flessner
- Ellen KW Brennan



*"The portion of the conference that I was dreading the most turned out to be one of the most encouraging.*

*Surprise, surprise, I am my own biggest critic!"*

*— 2019 attendee*



## Pop Talks

In addition to the Write-A-Thon, pop talks are also an iconic part of ComSciCon workshops. As each attendee described their research in 60 seconds or less, the rest of the audience flashed signs with either an **orange “Jargon”** or **green “Awesome”** written on them — in this way, attendees received real-time feedback on how effectively they were conveying their research. Our attendees delivered their pop talks in four groups of fifteen during the course of the weekend. Throughout the weekend we heard pop talks intended for elementary school aged children, adults at a bar, senior citizens, and a visiting (but friendly) alien race. Finally, we gave our invited experts a chance to try a pop talk during the first day of the conference in a dedicated “Expert Pop Talks” session. As one attendee said, “Learning how to explain your research to a general audience was very challenging yet extremely helpful.”



#ComSciConMI19

*“It is possible to convey the core of two years of research in 60 seconds!”*

## Networking Dinner

After the first day of the conference, attendees and experts were invited to Green Dot Stables in Lansing for a networking event. Food was provided as attendees and experts spent the better part of four hours(!) getting to know each other.



*“I really appreciated the time to get to know other people interested in scicomm from around the state.”*  
— 2019 attendee

*“It was great to just chat with such excited and engaged people of many different disciplines.”*  
— 2019 attendee



## Attendees

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation	Department
Erik	Amezquita	Michigan State University	Computational Mathematics, Science and Engineering
Jennifer	Baker	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Microbiology & Immunology
Reid	Blanchett	Michigan State University	Genetics Program
Allyson	Brady	Michigan State University	Earth and Environmental Sciences
Connor	Buckley	Michigan State University	Fisheries and Wildlife
Anna	Calkins	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Chemistry
Hannah	Chia	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Chemical Biology
Eric	Cordeiro Spinetti	Van Andel Institute	Center for Epigenetics
Jordan	Dalton	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Anthropology
Shiba	Dandpat	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Chemistry
Rachel	Domagalski	Michigan State University	Mathematics
Derek	Du Bois	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Chemistry
David	Filipovic	Michigan State University	Biomedical Engineering
Rachel	Frisbie	Michigan State University	Physics & Astronomy
Patricia	Garay	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Neuroscience
Lilianne	Gloe	Michigan State University	Psychology
Jordan	Hartman	Ohio State University	Horticulture and Crop Science
Chris	Henderson	Michigan State University	Fisheries & Wildlife
Joseph	Iafrate	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Applied Physics / Physics
Nick	Jaffe	Michigan State University	Fisheries and Wildlife
Fatima	Javed	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Cell and Developmental Biology
Raha	Kannan	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Biomedical Engineering
Sierra	Kaszubinski	Michigan State University	Integrative Biology
Rachel	Kirpes	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Department of Chemistry
Rosalane	Kithan	Michigan State University	Microbiology and Molecular Genetics
Joonyeup	Lee	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Psychology
Bin	Li	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Chemistry
Sunil	Madan	Michigan State University	Entomology
Vanessa	Maldonado	Michigan State University	Chemical Engineering and Material Science
Maya	Mallaby-Kay	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Physics
Joseph	Mastron	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	LSA Chemistry



First Name	Last Name	Affiliation	Department
Lyndsey	McMillon-Brown	Yale University	Chemical Engineering
Luis	Mendez	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Psychology
Bruna	Menezes	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Engineering
Rosa	Menjivar	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Cell and Molecular Biology
Garrett	Merz	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Physics
Josue	Millan	Indiana State University	Earth & Environmental Systems
Jeff	Olney	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Psychology
John	Owens	Northern Illinois University	Geology and Environmental Geosciences
Brandon	Patterson	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Radiology & Mechanical Engineering
Zechariah	Pfaffenberger	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Chemistry
Emma	Purcell	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Chemical Engineering
Ravi	Ranjan	Michigan State University	Department of Plant Biology
Jeremy	Rapp	Michigan State University	Earth and Environmental Sciences
Stefanie	Russman Block	Michigan State University	Psychology
Jishyra	Serrano	University of Rochester	Translational Biomedical Science
Kylie	Smith	Michigan State University	Biomedical Engineering
Jaimie	Strickland	Michigan State University	Large Animal Clinical Sciences
Maria-Efstratia (Tia)	Tsimpanouli	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Neurology
Evran	Ural	Michigan State University	Biomedical Engineering
Lotte	van den Goor	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology
Anthony	Van Witsen	Michigan State University	School of Journalism
Suhas	Vidhate	Michigan State University	Engineering
Julia	Whyte	Michigan State University	Fisheries and Wildlife
Ciara	Witt	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Chemistry
Zachary	Woessner	Michigan State University	Psychology, College of Social Sciences
Katherine	Wood	Michigan State University	Forestry
Katherine	Wozniak	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	Molecular, Cellular, & Developmental Biology
Allison	Young	Michigan State University	Integrative Biology
Nikki	Zabik	Wayne State University	Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences



## Schedule of Events

### 17 August 2019 (Day 1)

8:00a - 9:00a	Check-in, breakfast
9:00a - 9:15a	Opening remarks
9:15a - 9:30a	Pop Talks – Round 1
9:30a - 10:30a	<b>Panel 1 – Careers</b> <i>Ryan Bixenmann, Elyse Aurbach, Shoba Subramanian</i>
10:30a - 10:45a	Break
10:45a - 12:45p	<b>Breakout Session 1</b> – Websites and Portfolios ( <i>Elizabeth Anderson</i> ) – Podcasts and Video ( <i>Rachel Morris, Jim Monahan</i> )
12:45p - 1:45p	Lunch
1:45p - 2:00p	Pop Talks – Round 2
2:00p - 2:15p	Pop Talks – Experts
2:15p - 4:00p	<b>Write-A-Thon expert review</b>
4:00p - 4:15p	Break
4:15p - 5:30p	<b>Keynote – Dr. Samantha Yammie</b>
6:00p - ?? (close at 12a)	Networking Dinner <i>Green Dot Stables, 410 S Clippert St, Lansing, MI 48912</i>

### 18 August 2019 (Day 2)

8:30a - 9:00a	Check-in, breakfast
9:00a - 9:15a	Pop Talks – Round 3
9:15a - 10:15a	<b>Panel 2 – Ethics</b> <i>Dan Wixted, Michael Imperiale, Laura Cabrera</i>
10:15a - 10:30a	Break
10:30a - 12:30p	<b>Breakout Session 2</b> – Journalism for Scientists ( <i>Ian Demsky</i> ) – Illustration and Graphics ( <i>Patricia Beals</i> )
12:30p - 1:30p	Lunch + group photo
1:30p - 1:45p	Pop Talks – Round 4
1:45p - 2:45p	<b>Panel 3 – Creative SciComm</b> <i>Dan TerAvest, Alison Bernstein, Monika Wood, Patrick Morgan</i>
2:45p - 3:00p	Break
3:00p - 5:00p	<b>Breakout Session 3</b> – Science Policy & Advocacy 101 ( <i>William Dean, Edyta Sitko</i> ) – Data Visualization ( <i>Jacqui Broughton</i> )
5:00p - 5:15p	Closing remarks, event wrap-up

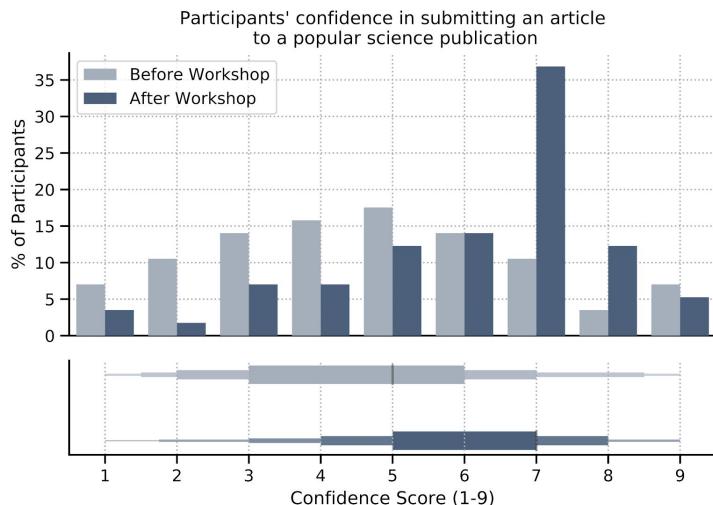


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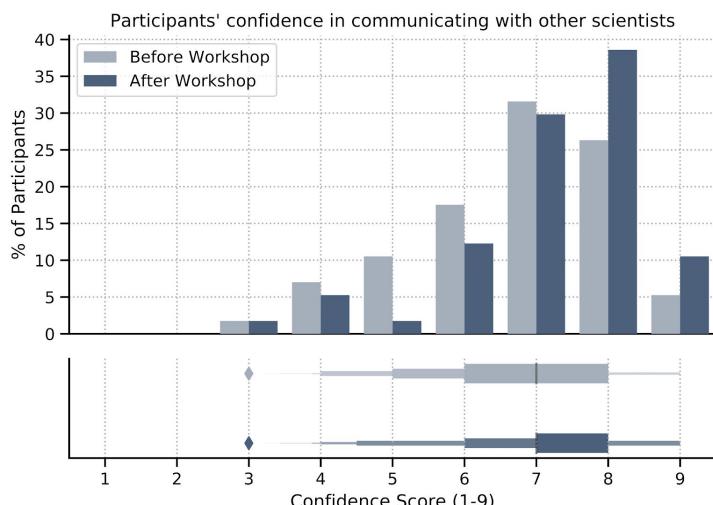
## Evaluations

Conference attendees were asked to complete both a pre- and post-conference survey. Their responses indicated increased confidence in their communication skills across the board!



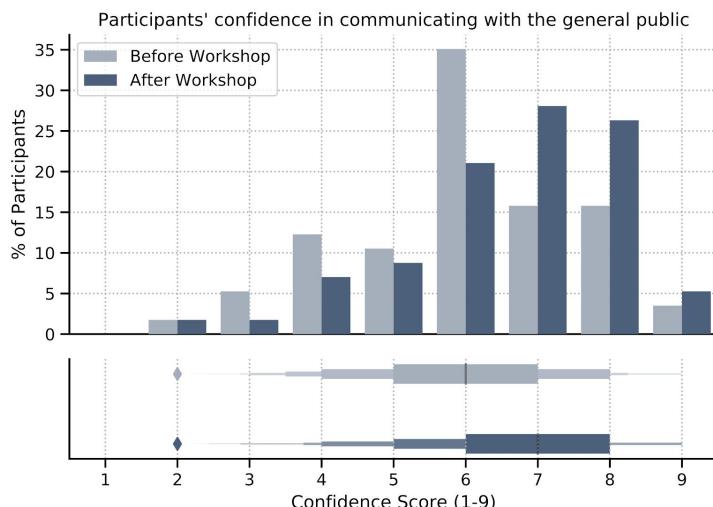
*“Saying things in a simple, understandable way helps you connect with people way more than using complicated language and coming off as complex and unapproachable.”*

– 2019 attendee



*“I found the write-a-thon very useful and I'm really glad it was part of the conference. It pushed me to write about something which I love but maybe wouldn't have taken the time to do so without the initiative. I'm planning to now submit this piece for publication.”*

– 2019 attendee



*“It is extremely easy to mix in your own field jargon when explaining your research, and that jargon can make your research wholly unapproachable by a non-expert rule.”*

– 2019 attendee



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## Testimonials

"A great space to establish like-minded friends in STEM who are interested in making a broad impact all while honing your communication skills!"

"I never knew how broad science communication could be. It was great to meet others seeking similar opportunities as I was, as well as to meet others interested in different aspects."

"ComSciCon MI allowed me to interact with many fellow graduate students while improving on my written and oral science communication skills. The featured workshops were varied and highly valuable; I plan to implement the learned best practices in my PhD. At the end, I truly felt a sense of community with the attendees and was inspired to continue my science communication with fervor."

"It was a great opportunity to meet graduate students with a wide variety of research interests but sharing a common interest in making science for accessible and approachable. I learned a lot!"

"ComSciCon-MI was a weekend well spent. I was surrounded by social scientists who all had the like goal of communicating science effectively to people of all backgrounds."

"ComSciCon-MI was an excellent conference that provided me with new tools and strategies moving forward in my science communication efforts employed to broadcast my own research."

"ComSciCon-MI was amazing and I really enjoyed attending it! There was a lot of useful information on how to create or improve our online (scientific) presence. I am also excited that my writeathon piece may actually get published."

"I loved attending ComSciCon-MI! It was a well organized and thought out conference, chock-full of great and useful content and amazing attendees!"

"ComSciCon-MI was fun and productive! There were plenty of exciting opportunities to learn, network, and collaborate with a diverse group of people."

"ComSciCon-MI reminded me that--with the right words-- science is digestible by anyone, regardless of their background. Speaking, writing, and presenting scientific information in accessible ways remains critical in our diverse communities and changing world. After ComSciCon-MI, I am ready and excited to improve my communication skills in every aspect of my work!"



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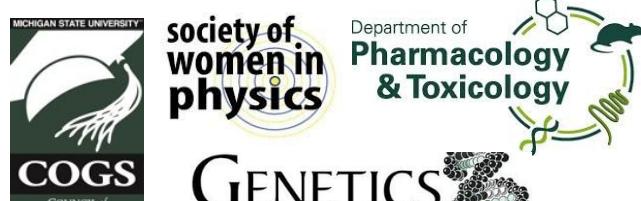
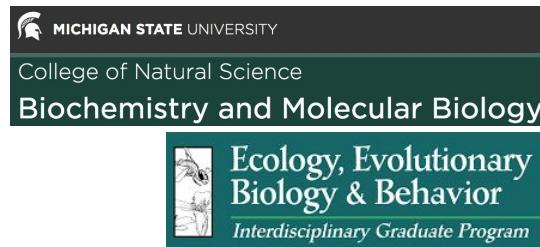
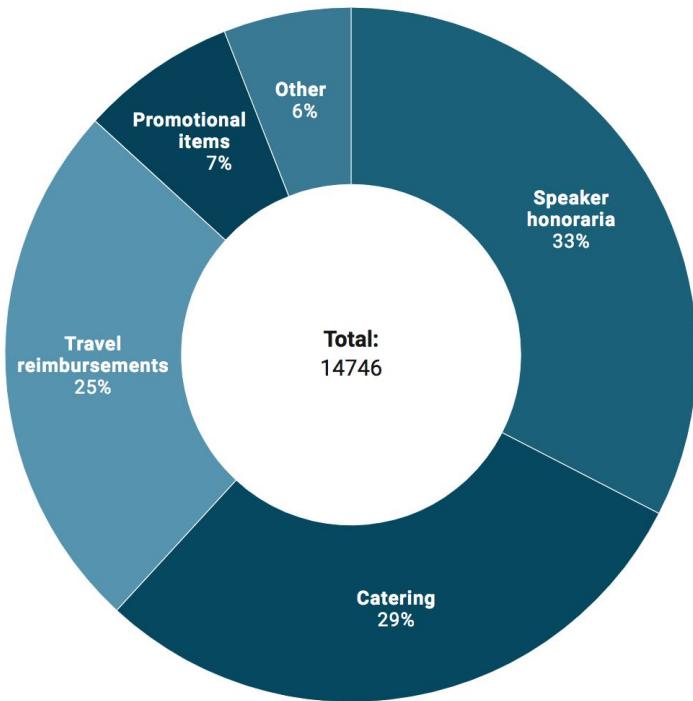
## Financial Summary

ComSciCon-Michigan 2019 was generously supported by:

Donor	Amount (USD)
UM Life Sciences Institute	\$500
MSU Physics & Astronomy	\$2,000
UM PIBS/OGPS	\$1,000
UM Society for Women in Physics	\$250
UM Physics	\$1,000
MSU Animal Science	\$500
MSU Genetics	\$250
UM Michigan Science Writers	\$250
UM MIRA	\$1,000
MSU Council of Grad Students	\$1,000
UM Neuroscience	\$350
UM Bioartography	\$500
MSU Pharmacology & Toxicology	\$1,000
MSU Graduate School	\$2,000
MSU Ecology, Evolutionary Biology, Behavior	\$1,000
MSU Biochemistry & Molecular Biology	\$300
MSU VP for Research & Graduate Studies	\$2,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$14,900</b>



Department of Physics and Astronomy





Thank you for your support!  
See you next year for ComSciCon-Michigan 2020!



#ComSciConMI19

ComSciCon-Michigan 2019 attendees and organizing committee