

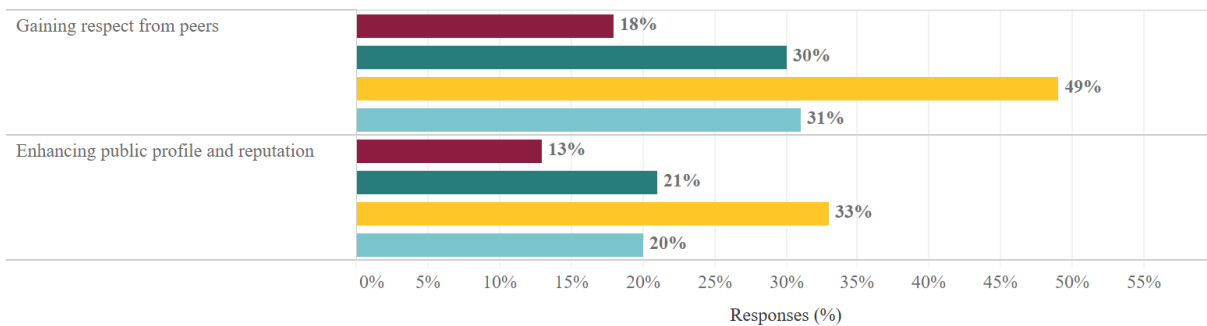
Media for Academic Scientists: Potential Benefits and Challenges

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Academic scientists can **effectively communicate** their research to the public by actively engaging with the media. Dr. Anthony Fauci is an example of a scientist who has used the media as a platform to successfully exchange and communicate scientific findings and uncertainties during the pandemic. He reached out to diverse audiences encouraging them to trust the science¹ and provided useful information through the media.

Media is a useful tool **to spread knowledge to a broader audience**², as it can bring **new perspectives** to research agendas and ensure public engagement. People can **stay connected with the scientific world** through traditional media³. Working with the media comes with potential benefits and challenges for academic scientists. [SciOPS](#) partnered with [SciLine](#) surveyed a random sample of 508 biologists, civil engineers, geographers and public health professors at U.S. universities about scientists' views of their interactions with the media. The results can be found both on the [SciOPS](#) platform and the [Chronicle article](#) "What Ph.Ds. can learn about talking with reporters" by Rick Weiss.

Figure 1: "What potential benefits do you see from interacting with the media?" (N=497)



■ Professor
 ■ Associate Professor
 ■ Assistant Professor
 ■ Full sample

SciOPS

Data source: SciOPS January 2021 Scientists and Media Survey

SciOPS asked scientists about two potential benefits from working with the media: gaining respect from peers and enhancing their public profile and reputation. **Figure 1** shows scientists' responses, by academic rank. It shows that **more assistant professors benefit from media interaction compared to associate and full professors**. For example, almost half of the assistant professors in our sample view gaining respect from peers as a potential benefit

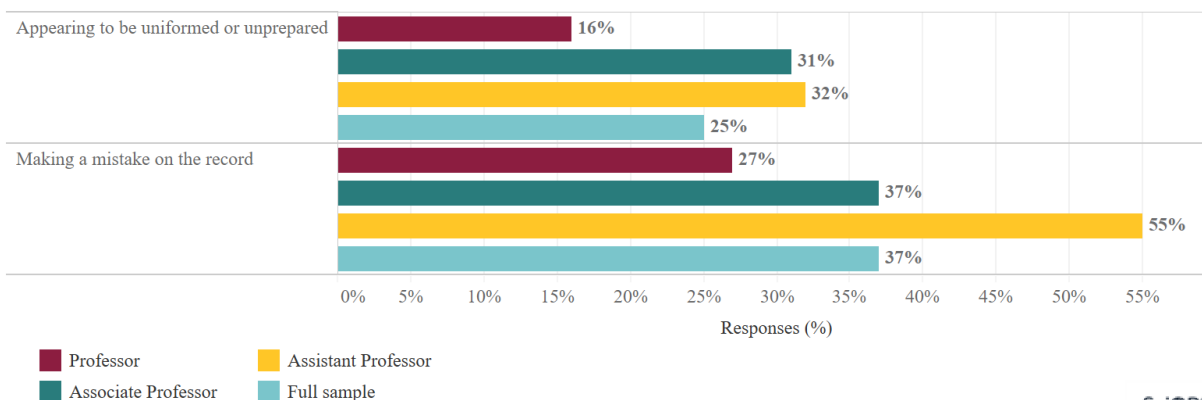
¹ <https://miscwriters.com/2020/12/03/a-lesson-in-science-communication-from-dr-anthony-fauci/>

² Social media for scientists. Nat Cell Biol 20, 1329 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41556-018-0253-6>

³ <https://magazine.scienceconnected.org/2017/03/scientists-social-media/>

compared to 30% of associate professors and 18% of full professors. One-third of assistant professors also view enhancing public profile and reputation as a potential benefit compared to only 21% and 13% of associate professors and professors, respectively. Views on potential benefits were statistically significant across academic rank. This difference might be explained by the fact that senior faculty have reached a point in their careers where they are more likely to feel they have earned sufficient respect from peers that media interaction would not make a difference. Possibly there is less to be gained and more to be lost by media interaction for full professors. It might also be that previous experiences with the media shape their perceptions of benefits. Junior faculty, on the other hand, may have less experience working with the media and believe media interaction might help them to enhance their public profile and reputation and gain respect. Additionally, because assistant professors tend to be younger, it is possible they are more comfortable with traditional media interactions.

Figure 2: “What potential challenges do you see from interacting with the media?” (N=496)



SciOPS
Data source: SciOPS January 2021 Scientists and Media Survey

Figure 2 shows the percent of respondents, overall and by rank, who believe making a mistake or appearing to be uninformed or unprepared are potential challenges from media interactions. **A higher proportion of assistant professors are concerned about appearing uninformed or unprepared (32%) or making a mistake (55%) on record compared to senior faculty.** These concerns are much lower among senior faculty. For example, only about quarter of full professors (27%) are worried about making a mistake on the record. These results were statistically significant across academic rank. The differences could be because full professors are more confident and experienced. Assistant professors, in comparison, are more concerned about potential challenges when interacting with the media and are concerned their work will be misrepresented or misunderstood by audiences.

In conclusion, our findings indicate that a higher percent of junior faculty report both potential benefits and challenges from media interactions when compared to more senior faculty. Overall, the majority of respondents do not see potential benefits from media interactions - figure 1 shows 20 to 31% of respondents see potential reputational benefits. These results point to a larger problem in science communication and interaction with the media and ultimately the public. Traditional media offer valuable opportunities for scientists to directly reach audiences⁴. However, if scientists see few potential benefits to engaging the media, that may deprive the public of the benefits to be gained from science communication. Effective science communication through the media is an important option for reaching a broad audience. It can also help advance faculty as leaders⁵ in their research areas.

⁴ <https://www.aaup.org/article/changing-media-and-academic-freedom#.YNg16OhKj3Q>

⁵ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/11/11/by-engaging-with-the-media-academics-can-enjoy-benefits-to-their-research>