

# Toward *Uncommon Ground*: Fostering Civil Disagreement in the Modern Communication World

When it comes to emerging areas of science, including nanotechnology, public engagement, and civil disagreement help improve awareness and understanding of new technologies. The Internet, and in particular sites enabling direct and open exchange among users, held the promise of more robust public discussions.

However, says Scheufele, the Internet mostly encourages users to surround themselves with likeminded information and people, and though comment sections do offer a place to disagree, anonymity fosters debate that's anything but civil.

Furthermore, Scheufele's research showed that the tone of comments responding to a nanotechnology article not only influenced readers' trust of the source, but also their understanding of the science.

In response to these findings, *Popular Science* closed their comments. But Scheufele argues that rather than shut down all debate, we need to find ways to encourage heterogeneous *and* civil exchanges as communication technology develops.



In a TEDx Talk, **Dr. Dietram A. Scheufele** questions the promise of the Internet to offer a space for healthy civil disagreement. He offers 3 suggestions to begin moving toward this ideal:

1. Reduce anonymity.
2. Increase opportunities for “informational serendipity.”
3. Encourage more people to join, rather than simply observe, debate.

The talk may be viewed at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2MvS4gm\\_mo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2MvS4gm_mo).

Scheufele's work focuses on the role that social media and other emerging modes of communication play in our society. In September, he co-organized a National Academy of Sciences Sackler colloquium on the “science of science communication” and spoke specifically about the politicization of science in the modern world of communication.

Along with **Dr. Elizabeth Corley** at ASU, Dr. Scheufele leads the Real-Time Technology Assessment (RTTA 2) research thrust at CNS-ASU that explores the understanding of nanotechnology among the general public and the role of the media in reflecting and influencing that understanding.

**Dietram A. Scheufele** | University of Wisconsin-Madison  
John E. Ross Professor of Science Communication  
Co-Principal Investigator, CNS-ASU  
2013 Fellow, American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)



Research, education and outreach activities at  
CNS-ASU are supported by the National Science  
Foundation under cooperative agreement #0937591