

New York University Journalism Academics, Stop Libeling Scientists And Doctors



By *Hank Campbell* — March 24, 2017



It's no secret that environmental groups, anti-science groups, and the industry groups that fund them are very well organized. Thanks to Freedom of Information Act requests we know [they have created an actual conspiracy to fight one they invented](#) [1].

Activists and their political allies float the narrative that industry secretly controls scientists in food, energy and medicine (yet, weirdly, not climate science.) Nothing could be further from the truth. Here is the real scoop from someone who worked at the highest levels in the private sector, who started the Science 2.0 movement, and who now runs a pro-science consumer advocacy non-profit: corporations do not give people money to do something they are already doing for free. It's bad precedent.

Instead, marketing groups take credit for it and use it to justify their bonuses. They create elaborate Powerpoint presentations where they convince people internally that they "own" social media, and that on command journalists and bloggers will fall in line. I can't tell you how many PR or advertising groups - Weber Shandwick, APCO, pick any you want - have at some point written me with a query like 'you support science, have you heard of company X? Would you like to talk to someone in corporate marketing there about how awesome they are?' and been summarily dismissed.

I don't care about your company, I care about science. Your company might just happen to be on the right side of the science and are making the modern world a better place. What have marketing people at companies *never* done? Written something like, 'You are doing great work, how can we make sure you keep doing it?' Not here, not at Science 2.0. It's dumb to give people working for free the idea that they might get money for it.

The reality is that the pro-science side is not organized at all the way anti-science groups are, not financially or culturally. We're a bunch of anarchists.

A few weeks ago I noted an effort by one organic marketing group, US Right To Know, [to try and get our scientists and doctors banned from writing in USA Today](#) [2]. It had dozens of co-signers. Let's think about our side. On the pro-science team, I couldn't even get dozens of co-signers to declare themselves in favor of ending cancer, half wouldn't bother to return emails and a whole bunch more would say they are uncomfortable taking a stand outside their specialization. Heck, we don't even have dozens of pro-science groups. On the anti- side, Organic Consumers Association alone props up over 300 "grass roots" organizations, US Right To Know is just their militant arm.

Helping them for free are politically sympathetic journalism academics, like at New York University, who side with them either for cultural allegiance or because they naively believe environmental groups are wholesome and the people who defend science are hiding something.

These academics move the goalposts a lot. They bounce around from 'Mother Jones says so' and, when challenged to at least use something from this century, insist we can never be credible to them unless we turn over our donor list, something they have never asked of any anti-science group. [Mother Jones has an entire foundation above it to launder corporate money](#) [3]. In reality, they have used transparency against us and want to continue to do so. They will manufacture a conflict of interest everywhere but in their own circle of friends and political sympathicos.

		
Charles Seife. When he can't find conflicts of interest, he makes them up [4]. No PhD, but knows science is wrong.	Michael Balter. Fired from Science magazine for being untrustworthy [5]. Not a professor, lies on his bio [6].	Dan Fagin. On the Pulitzer committee. Pulitzer Prize winner. Doesn't know what a conflict of interest [7] is.

The [average salary](#) [8] for a male professor at NYU is \$270,000. Though they routinely demand transparency (beyond the form 990s publicly posted on our site) they have repeatedly ignored my requests to show their tax returns in the interest of that same transparency. You can see our incomes right on this website. They refuse to be as transparent as we are, they instead move the goalposts and claim they want us to violate privacy laws.

And they refuse to disclose how they are qualified to libel our scientists and doctors on social

media.

Since none of them will be transparent about their credentials to undermine scientists and doctors, I will. Seife has a Master's Degree, but somehow wrangled a full professor title at this university charging students \$70,000 a year. Balter lies in his bio, he was never a professor at all, he was just an adjunct - I asked a scientist and he assured me that NYU does not call their adjuncts "professors" so Balter is being fraudulent by calling himself that. Fagin does not list any degree of any kind, so his professor title is even more impressive.

These people did no research on us **(1)** beyond spending five seconds having bias confirmed at Sourcewatch and Mother Jones, and lack even a single PhD, yet dismiss all of our science work as fraud. Talk about journalistic double standards. **(2)**



Gentlemen, I invited you to come to our office and tell these men and women they are frauds. You declined to do so, instead libeling people from a cozy Internet perch surrounded by your confirmation bias. The average salary of just three professors at NYU totals 50 percent more than the combined total of everyone at this table. Yet they insist that we must be a well-funded corporate group because their anti-science political allies say so.

So here is my challenge to you New York University journalism professors who are smearing our work: show us the evidence for your claims. Stop trotting out decades-old strategy documents that a fired employee handed over to *Mother Jones*, if you had ever worked in the real world you would

know that raising money at a non-profit is hard work and it requires a plan. No mumbo-jumbo about how one foundation on your side of the political aisle is a 'good' one and another one is bad, every foundation is corporate funded. Just because you are politically aligned with the beliefs of the funding choices at Ford, MacArthur, Johnson and dozens of the other largest foundations in the country does not change the reality of their money.

Do some real journalism, even if means stepping out of your ideological bubble. To their credit, *Mother Jones* at least did that. After that fired employee handed them our donor list, they called every donor of ours trying to get any of them to suggest they had any influence in our science results.

Not a single one did.

For obvious reasons, *Mother Jones* never published an article noting that, you don't waste expensive paper on null results. Plus, that would have been real journalism, not activist spin, and they don't understand it any more than NYU professors do.

NOTES:

(1) I even made a bet with Seife. I told him to bring a check for \$1,000 to our office a short subway ride away and I would also. And on camera he could see our donor list. If he could not show we were an "industry front" he had to donate the \$1,000 and if he could, I would give him the grand.

Even though his donation - which he would only have to give up if he were wrong about us, and he insisted repeatedly he was not - would be 100% tax-deductible, he was unwilling to show any confidence about what he bleats on Twitter. He wouldn't take the bet even though *he couldn't lose* financially. Only his reputation would be ruined.

Smears on social media are cheap. When he was asked to back up his libel with a bet, he ran. Wise move, Chuck.

(2) Actually, for being a \$72,000 a year college, their journalism department is rather low quality. With 28 full-time faculty only 5 have any advanced degrees: a JD, an MD and three PhDs. University of Missouri's School of Journalism, on the other hand, has 21 faculty with PhDs and their tuition is a very reasonable \$11,000. I can't wait for NYU journalism academics to say I am misrepresenting their school and being unfair and didn't do enough research, in a delightful bout of irony.

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Links

[1] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2016/09/22/will-you-be-our-echo-chamber-10197>

[2] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2017/02/27/anti-science-groups-demand-media-give-them-equal-time-or-ban-scientists-10906>

[3] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2016/06/06/no-mother-jones-lexus-does-not-control-hockey-game-scores>

- [4] <https://twitter.com/mbeisen/status/836719178044223488>
- [5] <http://www.imediaethics.org/science-michael-balter-fired/>
- [6] <https://www.acsh.org/sites/default/files/Michael%20Balter%20fraud.JPG>
- [7] <https://twitter.com/AlexBerezow/status/840121901162807297>
- [8] <http://faculty-salaries.startclass.com/l/8389/New-York-University-NYU>