

ASPIRE Module—Biomedical Research and Media, Fall 2016

Module Director: Assistant Director and Executive Director of New Media and Electronic Publications, VUMC News and Public Affairs

Number of students: Up to five

Day and time: Eight weeks on Wednesdays, 9-10 a.m., Sept. 21-Nov. 30.

Learning Objectives: At the conclusion of the class, students will understand the process of interviewing one or more sources and writing a publishable news story on a biomedical research or health topic; understand the daily interactions between the local and national media and a medical center such as Vanderbilt that seeks to influence both public health and its national reputation via media relations; and understand the key role of social media in the modern media environment. Students will also have the opportunity to become more skilled at being interviewed and accurately conveying information, even in a challenging environment. Additionally, the students will have an understanding of some of the key differences in professional assumptions between media professionals and science professionals.

Assessment Plan: The module director will evaluate students based on written and class participation, including an understanding of the choices of communication tools and techniques; mechanisms for identification of appropriate stories to put before the public; and in what formats.

Readings: Class readings will be news and feature stories from contemporary sources, including [news stories about developments in biomedical research](#), [first person medical stories](#), and [longer form pieces about medical and research topics](#).

In addition, selected readings will be assigned from the provided text: [A Field Guide for Science Writers](#), Blum, Knudson and Henig, Eds.

Written Assignments: students will contribute three written pieces during the course: one aliquot (150 words) and one enterprise news piece (500-600 words) suitable for publication the VUMC Reporter and one profile piece (500 words) to be included in the BRET Newsletter: [Results and Discussion](#).

Syllabus:

Sept. 21: Introduction, survey of news habits, the different worlds of scientists and journalists, “News to Me” discussion. **Assignments: Read provided article ([The Itch](#)) for discussion next class; students should begin thinking about one or two potential story ideas or topics for a news writing assignment, due Nov 9.**

Sept 28: Discussion of assigned reading. Tips from Bill Snyder on how to research and write an Aliquot. **Assignment: write an Aliquot, due Nov 9 (bring a draft to next class 10/19).**

Oct 5: No Class

Oct 12: No Class

Oct. 19: Discussion with panel of science communicators—Bill Snyder and Leigh MacMillan, Ph.D., writers, and Carole Bartoo, R.N., research nurse and former television journalist. Aliquot assignment critique. **Assignments: Finalize idea for news article assignment; pick up profile assignment.**

Oct. 26: Tour VUStar facility with Craig Boerner.

Nov 2: An infectious disease physician's interactions with news media—William Schaffner, M.D., professor of Preventive Medicine. **Assignment: Two sentence description of your research interest.**

Nov 9: The skill of being interviewed, including some interview tryouts—Kathy Rivers. **News article and Aliquot assignments due.**

Nov 16: Social media and science news—Cynthia Manley and/or Jessica Turner.

Nov 23: No Class (Thanksgiving week)

Nov. 30: **Profile writing assignment due.** Module wrap-up, critical feedback on writing assignments, next steps.