

ASPIRE Module—Biomedical Research and Media, Fall 2019

Module Director: Wayne Wood, MLAS, VUMC News and Communications

Number of students: Up to five (or possibly six).

Day and time: Eight weeks on Wednesdays, 9-10 a.m., Sept. 18-Nov. 13 (no meeting on Oct. 9).

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 understand some of the key similarities and 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 news piece (300-600 words) suitable for publication the [VUMC Reporter](#) or [VUMC Voice](#), and one profile piece (500 words) to be included in the BRET Newsletter: [Results and Discussion](#).

Syllabus:

Sept. 18: Introduction, survey of news habits, the different worlds of scientists and journalists. What is news and how to write it. **Assignments for news stories will be made on an individual basis as stories are available.**

Sept. 25: Discussion with science communicators — Bill Snyder and Leigh MacMillan, PhD. **Aliquot assignment; Two-sentence description of your research interest for media training.**

Oct. 2: Using the news media to educate the public — William Schaffner, MD, professor of Preventive Medicine. **Reading assignments for discussion on Oct. 30.**

Oct. 9: No Class

Oct. 16: The skill of being interviewed, including some interview tryouts — Kristin Smart, VUMC information officer and former broadcast reporter. **Writing check in.**

Oct. 23: VUStar interviews — Craig Boerner, national media director for VUMC, and Brian Smokler, manager of VUStar broadcast facility.

Oct. 30: Discussion of assigned reading. **Writing check in.**

Nov. 6: What a reporter wants to know from a scientist — Blake Farmer, senior health care reporter, WPLN Nashville Public Radio. **Writing check in.**

Nov. 13: Social media and science news — Holly Fletcher, senior public relations specialist. Module wrap-up. **Writing assignments due.**