ASPIRE module—Biomedical Research and Media, Fall 2014

Module Director: Wayne Wood, MLAS, assistant in Medical Administration and Education

Number of students: Up to five

Day and time: Eight weeks on Wednesdays, 9-10 a.m., Sept. 17-Nov. 5.

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 or biomedical research or a 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.

Draft syllabus:

Sept. 17: Introduction, survey of news habits, the different worlds of scientists and journalists, “News to Me” discussion. Assignments: Read several provided news and feature articles for discussion next class; bring one or two potential story ideas or topics for a news writing assignment (due Nov. 5).

Sept. 24: Discussion of assigned reading. Step by step—how a journal article becomes a news article. Work with each student on choice and direction of writing assignment.


Oct. 15: Check-in on writing assignments, tour VUStar facility with Craig Boerner.


Oct. 29: The skill of being interviewed, including some interview tryouts—Kathy Rivers. Last check-in on writing assignment.

Nov. 5: **News article writing assignment due.** Module wrap-up, next steps.