

ASPIRE Module—Biomedical Research and Media, Fall 2017

Module Director: Wayne Wood, MLAS, 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. 20-Nov. 15 (no meeting on Oct. 11)

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. 20: Introduction, survey of news habits, the different worlds of scientists and journalists. Tips from Bill Snyder on how to research and write an Aliquot. **Assignment: write an Aliquot, due Nov 8 (bring a draft to next class 10/18).**

Sept 27: Discussion with panel of science communicators—Bill Snyder and Leigh MacMillan, Ph.D., writers, and Kristen Smart, a former news anchor. Aliquot assignment critique. **Assignments: Read provided articles, including [The Itch](#), for discussion Oct. 18; students should begin thinking about one or two potential story ideas or**

topics for a news writing assignment, due Nov 8.

Oct 4: Tour VUStar facility with Craig Boerner.

Oct 11: No Class

Oct. 18: Discussion of assigned reading. What is news and how to write it.

Assignments: Finalize idea for news article assignment; pick up profile assignment.

Oct. 25: What a reporter wants to know from a scientist. Guest: Blake Farmer, news director, WPLN Nashville Public Radio. Writing check in. **Assignment: Two-sentence description of your research interest.**

Nov 1: The skill of being interviewed, including some interview tryouts—Dagny Stuart, VICC communicator and former broadcast reporter. **News article and Aliquot assignments due.**

Nov 8: Social media and science news—Cynthia Manley, VUMC social media team leader.

Nov 15: An infectious disease physician's interactions with news media—William Schaffner, M.D., professor of Preventive Medicine. **Profile writing assignment due.** Module wrap-up, critical feedback on writing assignments, next steps.