

**University of Guelph**  
**College of Biological Science**  
**Department of Human Health and Nutritional Sciences**  
**Course Outline**

**HHNS\*6000: HHNS-SPARK**  
**Winter 2012**

**Course Co-Coordinator:**

Owen Roberts, M.Sc., Ed.D.  
Director of Research Communications  
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**Course Description:**

The purpose of this class is to learn applied research communications techniques, through practical experience. Research shows most Canadians get their health news from the media, making HHNS students' understanding of the news writing process pertinent and career-oriented.

This course experience will be part of the successful SPARK (Students Promoting Awareness of Research Knowledge) program at the University of Guelph, in which students write, edit and coordinate a variety of news publications that highlight University of Guelph research activities primarily for the public, as well as for specific research stakeholders (e.g. research funding decisions makers, granting councils).

HHNS-SPARK students will learn about communication theory and application, and they will write two journalistic stories that must be considered publishable by the course coordinator, an experienced journalist. To establish the story topics, students will explore research leads on research ongoing at University of Guelph. In consultation with the course coordinator, students will develop a topic, research the story and write the story to be ready for publication. These stories will be evaluated by Dr. Owen Roberts, the Director of Research Communications with the primary assessment being whether the individual stories are publishable in the popular media, outside of the scientific press.

To practice scientific analysis and synthesis skills in relation to news stories, students will find a news story in the mass media related to a scientific topic of their choice and review it from a scientific perspective. This will involve finding primary scientific articles that support the news story and critically analyzing those papers and relating the results to the content of the news story. This scientific critique will be graded by course co-coordinator Prof. Alison Duncan. Students will also practice reviewing the news story from a journalistic perspective in which they

will apply theory learned from Owen Roberts. This journalistic critique will be graded by course co-coordinator Owen Roberts.

This course is primarily self-directed and the students will learn the concepts related to research communication through their practice of writing two news stories. They will learn the steps involved in assembling a news story on a scientific topic through guidance from Dr. Roberts. Students will receive formal lecture from Dr. Roberts in the beginning of the semester on news writing, and one-on-one instruction and mentoring through the semester.

**Course Objectives:**

Upon completion of this course, students should:

1. Describe the concepts related to communicating research.
2. Learn the steps involved in assembling a news story on a scientific topic.
3. Understand the basic components of scientific writing in journalism.
4. Critically analyze science stories in the media.
5. Have improved journalistic writing skills.
6. Have improved scientific writing skills.

**Class Meetings:**

There will be one introductory session with the course co-coordinators (Monday January 9, 2012, 12:45pm). We will also meet as a class group four other times periodically throughout the semester, always on Mondays at 12:30pm:

- Monday January 9<sup>th</sup>, 12:45pm to 215pm, ANNU338
- TBD
- TBD
- TBD
- TBD

Efforts in the course will be primarily self-directed with periodic consultation with both course coordinators.

**Evaluation:**

News Story#1 (assigned)	30%
News Story#2 (not assigned)	30%
Scientific and Journalistic News Critique	35%
Effort/Progress Throughout Semester	5%