

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

**HHNS*6000: HHNS-SPARK
Fall 2009, Winter 2010**

Course Co-Coordinator:

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Course Description:

The purpose of this class is to learn applied research communications 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, etc.).

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 Owen Roberts, the Director of Research Communications, in conjunction with the SPARK coordinator, 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 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 the course co-coordinator Prof. Alison Duncan.

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

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. Students are also welcome as guests in pertinent classes of REXT 3050 Agricultural Communications (Fall 2009 Semester: Mondays 7pm in Roz 108). Efforts in the course will then be primarily self-directed with periodic consultation with both course coordinators.

Evaluation:

News Story#1	30%
News Story#2	30%
Scientific News Critique	35%
Effort/Progress Throughout Semester	5%