

ASU course will teach scientists how to communicate their ideas

BY ALDEMARO ROMERO, AMY R. PEARCE
AND JOHN B. ZIBLUK
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Sometimes scientific researchers run into difficulties communicating with general audiences and the media. The words are big and the sentences are long. The eyes of readers

glaze over when they read them; audience members tune out when they hear them.

Yet the understanding of science, as well as the outcomes of scientific research, are increasingly important as the general public becomes more aware of health and environmental concerns and myriad other

issues. At Arkansas State University, science faculty and students engage in significant work that affects education, business and other areas.

This fall, a new course will give ASU graduate students the chance to learn how to let people outside their specialized fields better know and understand their work.

Titled "Science Communication for Scientists," this course will provide students with the tools to better explain scientific topics to both learned audiences and the general public.

The idea for the course originated among the graduate students of the Environmental Sciences Program.

Some of them had been involved in a workshop on how to write popular science articles, and they thought that a full-semester course aimed at improving their writing and oral skills would greatly improve their professional abilities.

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ASU: Three instructors have backgrounds in writing

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The course will be hands-on. It will begin by asking students to give a short presentation and prepare an article for the popular press about a scientific topic. The presentation will be videotaped so the students can watch themselves. With the help of instructors they can improve the organization and delivery of their talk. Articles will be proofread and discussed with the students so they can also improve their writing abilities.

Subsequent course topics will cover how to deal with the media, how to prepare for various types of interviews, how to prepare news releases, and how to write radio and TV scripts.

At the end of the semester, students will prepare pieces for all of the above media that will be produced and sent to different outlets. Students will also give presentations to large audiences, and those presentations will be videotaped and analyzed by the instructors.

About the instructors

The three instructors who will be team-teaching this course bring with them different experiences and perspectives.

Aldemaro Romero, chairman and professor of biology, has written more than 500 articles and books for both learned and popular audiences. He has also written,

produced and directed more than 1,500 radio shows and 50 television shows in the United States, Europe and Latin America. He was awarded the Feijoo Prize for science journalism by the Spanish Association for the Advancement of Science, and his TV

At the end of the semester, students will prepare pieces for print, radio and television, and will give presentations to large audiences.

documentaries have received a number of awards. For two years Romero has been editing and-or writing a weekly column on science for *The Sun*.

Amy R. Pearce, assistant professor of psychology, earned a certificate in science communication through the ANU Centre for the Public Awareness of Science while earning her doctorate in neuroscience from the Australian National University.

She has written for scientific journals, newspapers and television, and was a producer, writer and announcer for "Fuzzy Logic," a long-running science education radio show. She has communicated

science at national and international forums to audiences comprised of youths and adults through science fairs and workshops.

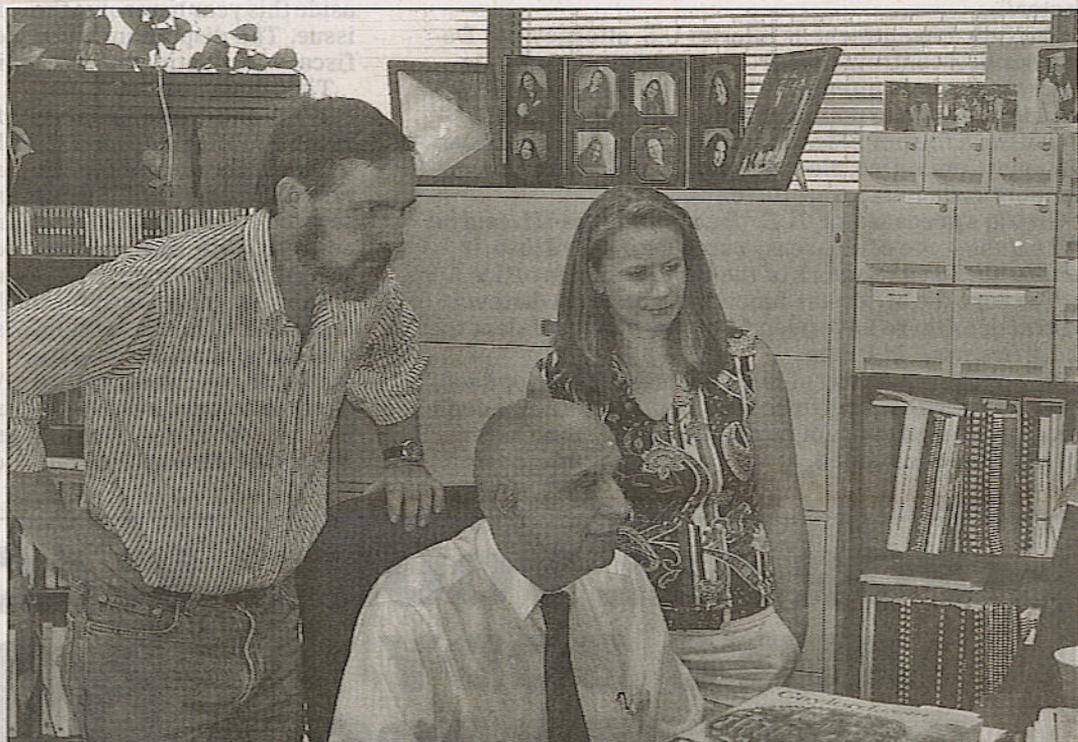
John B. Zibluk, associate professor of journalism, teaches photography, photojournalism, news design, desktop publishing and news writing. He was the 2002 National Geographic magazine faculty fellow, a program that allowed him to work for all facets of the magazine for a summer. He continues to work with the magazine on educational programs. He worked as a reporter and editor for newspapers in Connecticut and for the Memphis Commercial-Appeal.

In 2005 he won the Robin T. Garland Award, which is the National Press Photographers Association educator award. He is a published scholar and ethics columnist for *News Photographer* magazine.

The goal of this course is to prepare science graduates from ASU to be more effective professionals in a world where communication to diverse audiences is more important than ever.

For more information contact the ASU Department of Biological Sciences at biology@astate.edu.

Dr. Romero is chairman and professor at the Department of Biological Sciences. Dr. Pearce is an assistant professor of psychology, and Dr. Zibluk is associate professor of journalism at ASU.



Dr. John B. Zibluk (from left), Dr. Aldemaro Romero and Dr. Amy R. Pearce prepare class materials for the new Arkansas State University course on science communication. Kimberly Marshall | Special to The Sun