A-State aims to improve science communication

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SPECIAL TO THE SUN

For some time, a great number of universities have been pondering how to best prepare students to become better communicators of science. In a world dominated by more and more complex science and technology, stagnant if not lowering science literacy levels and more pressure to obtain financing for research, scientists are being placed in the position of communicating what they do and why it is important to audiences ranging from children to legislators.

With the goal to prepare science graduates from Arkansas State University to be more effective professionals in a world where communication to diverse audiences is more important than ever, ASU launched a new course last fall: “Science Communication for Scientists.”

Several A-State students participated in this hands-on course. Among the products were popular articles published in The Sun, radio scripts and TV shows, all of which can be read, heard or seen at: http://biology.astate.edu/Outreach/outreach.htm.

Interdisciplinary approach

Given the unique nature of this interdisciplinary course, the results of this experience were presented at the meeting titled “New Agendas in Science Communication” in Austin, Texas, Feb. 22-23. The presentation was made by the three instructors of the course who also authored this article.

One of the most gratifying results to report was how an interdisciplinary approach based on the different backgrounds of the faculty involved can help to provide students with the kind of diverse perspectives that are needed to succeed as a science communicator.
Jane Anfinson is shown shooting a take of Dr. Al Christian, member of the biology faculty, for one of the documentaries produced by ASU students.

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Memphis Commercial-Appeal. In 2005 he won the National Press Photographers Association Educator Award, the Robin T. Garland Award. He is a published scholar and ethics columnist for News Photographer magazine.

ASU is expanding its scientific research endeavors and the need is great to establish awareness and understanding of related science issues in Northeast Arkansas. Therefore, science communication efforts at ASU aim to increase science awareness in the community and to improve communication skills of ASU students, particularly those in journalism and science fields.

There is great potential at ASU to work with the Arkansas Biosciences Institute, graduate programs in communication, sciences and nursing, among others.

Look for upcoming community education opportunities related to improving science awareness, these include Brain Bee to be held at the Craighead County Jonesboro Public Library, March 27 and Girls of Promise on the ASU campus April 12.

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

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