5-21-2010


Melanie Marquez

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Walters Creates Center for Scientists and the Mass Media

Posted May 21, 2010 at 2:07 pm by Melanie Marquez

(St. Petersburg, Fla.) May 21, 2010 – In an effort to improve communication among scientists and the public, journalism professor Mark Walters established the Center for Scientists and the Mass Media at USF St. Petersburg. Still in its infancy, the center has already held a workshop for the Gulf of Mexico Alliance on communicating science topics with a lay audience. Plans are to hold four workshops a year and be a resource in other ways for science communication.

Traditionally, the method to improve the communication of science through mass media was to increase scientific literacy among journalists,” Walters said. “We think the way to go is to increase media literacy among scientists.”

Walters would like the center, through collaboration among faculty members in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies and with the Poynter Library, to provide assistance to scientists looking for effective ways to communicate their research and findings with journalists and the public. For example, with the help of visual communications professor Paul Wang, the center could provide informational graphics and video services for scientists in need of relevant ways to share their work. The center could help scientists transform scientific abstracts for lay audiences.

Another aspect of the center’s work will focus on examining the disconnect between public understanding of science and society’s major debates on topics such as global climate change and evolution. The center will seek partnerships with organizations to manage the public outreach or education components that are common to federal and other grants.

Walters’ expertise in science communication stems from his training as a veterinarian and experience as a journalist; he has combined the two and offered professional consulting on science communication and journalism for years. He has written books on the topic and looks at better communication as the key to greater public support for scientific research.

I want the center to help change misperceptions of science,” Walters said. “And it has to begin with scientists becoming better communicators.”

The center will operate from an office in the Undergraduate Research Labs building. To learn more about the center, contact Mark Walters at (727) 873-4544 or mw@mail.usf.edu.

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