

BIOM*4210
Principles & Practice of Health Sciences Research
Fall Semester 2011

*“The aim of science is not to open the door to infinite wisdom,
but to set a limit to infinite error.” - Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)*

Class location and meeting times:

Mon, Wed & Fri: 1:30-2:20 pm, MACK121

Coordinator:

Dr. Brad Hanna, Department of Biomedical Sciences

Ext. 54534, Room 1646D

E-mail: bhanna@uoguelph.ca

I. Rationale:

Avoidable errors in experimental design, methodology, analysis and interpretation are surprisingly common in the published medical literature. It has been estimated that only about 20% of the medical research articles published in the 1990s are free of important flaws, leaving the conclusions of the remaining 80% in doubt. Even when good scientific evidence is available regarding a specific health issue, it is not necessarily used to guide clinical decisions; the information may not be considered at all, or flawed reasoning may enter into the decision-making process. Estimates of the percentage of North American medical procedures and technologies that are evidence-based have improved from about 15% in the 1970s to about 20% today. This suggests that the majority of the medical procedures now employed are of uncertain value to patients. These numbers reflect the situation in human medicine; in veterinary medicine the scientific basis for what we do is often even more limited. This course will address some of the major issues related to experimental design and methodology in the health sciences, and critical thinking as it relates to the use of medical knowledge. Selected issues that influence public perceptions of science in general will also be discussed.

II. Course Aims and Objectives:

The general aims of this course are: (1) to assist participants in becoming more critical readers of the medical literature (2) to enhance participants' critical thinking abilities by exploring some of the most common errors of reasoning in every day thought and in medicine in particular, and (3) to address selected issues related to scientific integrity and professionalism. Achievement of these aims will contribute to the ultimate goal of basing health sciences decisions, in research or in clinical practice, on the best available evidence.

This course is divided into three units. Specific Learning Objectives by Unit:

Critical Thinking: Logic & Reasoning

By the end of this unit, students will:

- know the criteria of a good argument and be able to develop good arguments
- recognize common errors of logic and tactics for avoiding a good argument
- understand different views on the relationship between scientific data and the real world

Critical Appraisal & The CONSORT Statement

By the end of this unit, students will:

- understand the relationships between study designs and levels of evidence in medical research
- be able to justify selected scientific procedures for the avoidance of bias

- be able to assess the methodological quality of health sciences research

Scientific Integrity & Professionalism

By the end of this unit, students will:

- develop informed opinions about ethical issues related to health sciences research, such as plagiarism, fabrication of data, selective citation of the literature, authorship, peer review, conflict of interest, etc.

III. Format and Procedures:

This is a lecture- and discussion-based course, with some independent components. Students are expected to participate in discussions and to conduct themselves in a scholarly and professional manner at all times.

IV. Recommended Texts:

- (a) Unit 1: *Attacking Faulty Reasoning* (6th edition), TE Damer, Thomson-Wadsworth, 2009.
 (b) Unit 2: *Critical Appraisal of Epidemiological Studies and Clinical Trials*, 3rd edn., Mark Elwood, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2007 (ISBN: 978-0-19-852955-2).

V. Calculation of Course Grades

Individual and group assignments will account for 70% of the course grade. The remaining 30% will be derived from the final exam.

VI. Academic Integrity

The University of Guelph takes a very serious view of Academic Misconduct. Included in this category are such activities as cheating on examinations, plagiarism, misrepresentation, and submitting the same material in two different courses without written permission. Students are expected to be familiar with the section on Academic Misconduct in the Graduate Calendar and should be aware that expulsion from the University is a possible penalty.

VII. Electronic Recording of Classes

The electronic recording of classes is expressly forbidden without the prior written consent of the instructor. This prohibition extends to all components of the course, including, but not limited to, lectures and seminars, whether conducted by the instructor, a student, or any other designated person. When recordings are permitted they are permitted solely for the private use of the authorized student and may not be reproduced or disseminated in any manner without the express written consent of the instructor.

VIII. Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students should register with the Centre for Students with Disabilities to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations, and contact the course coordinator at the beginning of the course to discuss specific needs.

IX. Course Schedule

To be posted separately at the beginning of the semester.

X. Course Evaluation

Students will be asked to complete a questionnaire on the instructors' teaching abilities. This information is required by the university to evaluate faculty performance for purposes of Tenure, Promotion and Selective Increases. Administered by a third party rather than the instructors, these evaluations will be delivered to the instructors only after the final grades have been submitted to the Registrar's Office. The numerical ratings from the form will be made available to the Chair for administrative purposes. If a

student wishes the Chair to see his/her written comments in addition to the scores, he/she must include with those comments his/her name (legibly printed) and signature.

Additional Resources

- Ten Golden Rules of Academic Integrity:
http://www.webshops.uoguelph.ca/AcademicIntegrity/integrity_rules.cfm
- What is Plagiarism?
<http://www.webshops.uoguelph.ca/AcademicIntegrity/plagiarism.cfm>
- Vancouver Style for biomedical citations:
<http://www.library.uq.edu.au/training/citation/vancouv.html>
- Barker K. At the helm: a laboratory navigator. Cold Spring Harbor, N.Y: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 2002.
- Barker K. At the bench: a laboratory navigator. New York: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 1998.
- Booth V. Communicating in science: writing a scientific paper and speaking at scientific meetings. Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Browner WS, Hiscock T. Publishing and presenting clinical research. Baltimore, Md: Williams & Wilkins, 1999.
- Day RA. Scientific English: a guide for scientists and other professionals. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1992.
- Day RA, netLibrary I. How to write & publish a scientific paper. Phoenix, Az: Oryx Press, 1998.
- Dent NJ. Good research practices: a practical guide to the implementation of the GxPs. Oxford; Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1997.
- Gilpin AA, Patchet-Golubev P. A guide to writing in the sciences. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.