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[Home](#) » [Spring 2012](#) » [Around the Columns](#) » Scientifically speaking

Around the Columns

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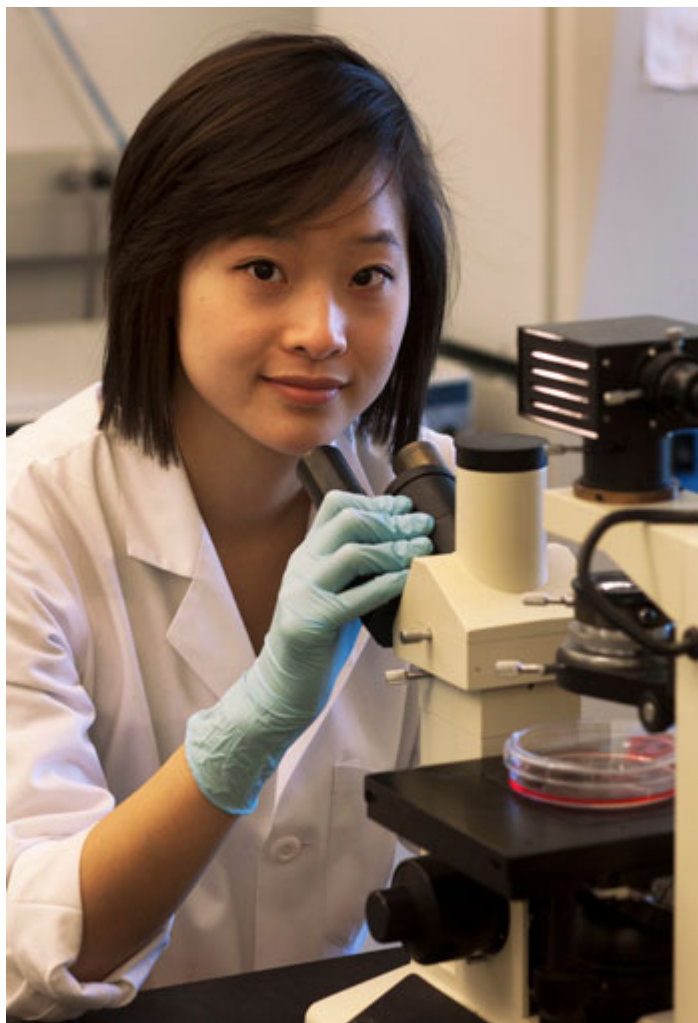
Grace Olinger is learning to be a translator at Mizzou. Her translation work, however, does not involve a foreign language.

“There is plain English that everyone understands,” the junior from Belleville, Ill., says. “Then there is the language of science.”

As an undergraduate researcher at MU, Olinger believes scientists are responsible for communicating their work to the public in an understandable way. “Scientists need to know that not everyone thinks like them,” says Olinger, a Hughes Research Fellow who is conducting research on HIV.

In addition to performing research, Hughes Fellows work with instructors and graduate students from MU’s School of Journalism to learn how to communicate science more effectively.

“Journalists are the best at communicating with the public,”



Grace Olinger believes scientists should communicate with the public in understandable ways. Photo by Rob Hill

Olinger says. “[Scientists] are learning how to communicate like them.”

Hughes Fellows write weekly blog entries in which they translate a scientific article into everyday language. They also write two articles each semester and create a photo essay and a video about the research they are conducting.




“We are not just doing research for ourselves,” Olinger says. “We are doing it for the greater good. We are not writing just to write. We want people to be entertained, and we want them to like science.”

Olinger, who graduated from Belleville (Ill.) East High School, came to Missouri because of the opportunity to do research as an undergraduate. “I knew I wanted to be a researcher,” she says. “To do that, I need some kind of research experience during my undergraduate years. Mizzou presented that opportunity.”

She found that opportunity in the lab of Marc Johnson, an associate professor in molecular microbiology and immunology at MU, where they modify parts of HIV and other related viruses, and observe how it would react in different environments. They hope to learn more about the virus and use the research to develop new methods for gene therapy.

The research findings may be significant, but Olinger’s skills at telling others about the work may be what sets her apart from other undergraduate researchers at Mizzou.

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E-mail: Mizzou@missouri.edu

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