

Clarkson Research Group Calls for Media Scrutiny of Nanotechnology

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The media play a defining role in educating people about nanotechnology. Yet, historically, articles about [nanotech](#) have provided a relatively "free pass" to this emerging science according to a recently released study by a Clarkson University research team.

Published in the online journal Nanotechnology Law & Business, the study is based on 303 articles published in 22 American and Canadian newspapers and seven news magazines from 1986-2000. The Clarkson team found that over this time, media reports about nanotechnology were overwhelmingly positive and based largely on speculation and opinion with few articles citing specific data or research methods. Nanotechnology was reported as an elite science associated primarily with prestigious universities and well-known companies. Sustained coverage of societal issues associated with nanotechnology did not emerge until 2000 and this reporting was based entirely on opinion and speculation.

The research team is funded by the National Science Foundation and is comprised of Brenton D. Faber, associate professor of Communication and Media, and two undergraduate research assistants, Justin A. MacKinnon and Margaret A. Petroccione, both Communication and Media majors. The three are co-authors of the report. The authors argue that in science writing, it is crucial that media reports be accurate, informative and critical. While some of this responsibility passes to those providing source data for journalistic research, science writers must also recognize the role they play in explaining, critiquing and

legitimizing nanotechnology. "People use scientific popularizations for a variety of reasons," noted Faber, "including scientists who want to keep current in areas other than their own."

The team argued that reporting should not skip over the social issues and impacts of nanotechnology, nor should journalists take for granted the economic impacts, technological innovations, or scientific progress associated with nanotechnology. A more critically engaged reporting does not do a disservice to the field, they argued. Instead, such reporting would present a more credible and critical field to an interested and, as yet, supportive external audience. The team is currently examining articles published from 2000-2005 and plans to report on this data in spring 2006.

Source: Clarkson University

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