Welcome Message from the New Head

Stephanie Anderson, Professor and Head

In 2017, the Department of Political Science and Global and Area Studies program merged to create the new School of Politics, Public Affairs, & International Studies or SPPAIS—pronounced “spice”. I am very proud to head this new institution, which boasts 14 faculty, almost 400 undergraduate majors, and three graduate programs, including the largest master’s program at the university, the Master’s in Public Administration (MPA). SPPAIS has taken over the entire south side of the A&S building; please come visit!

I am a fifth-generation Wyomingite and ranch-owner, hailing from Savery, Wyoming in Carbon County. All my family has gone to UW, and I started working in both political science and international studies as an adjunct in 1994. It gives me great pleasure to see how these programs have grown, and I look forward to leading the School through this new exciting phase. In 2017 alone, SPPAIS has hosted a Public Administration conference, brought in major speakers such as Baroness Catherine Ashton, former EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy and one of the architects of the Iran nuclear deal, won a multi-thousand dollar grant from the German embassy in Washington to put on a series of events regarding the recent German election, and had one of our own, Judge Margaret McKeown (INST ’72), honored for UW’s Distinguished Alumni award. In this newsletter, read about our retiring faculty, Professor Maggi Murdock, and our newest faculty member, Professor Zoe Pearson. Learn about our students and alumni, including two double political science/international studies majors who just got married! Welcome to School’s community. Together, we’ll make it thrive!
In 2017, after forty-two years of service to the University of Wyoming as professor, scholar, administrator, and donor, Professor Maggi Murdock retired from the Department of Political Science.

Murdock began her career at the University of Wyoming in 1975, after her husband, Nick Murdock, started law school at UW a year earlier. While working on her Ph.D. at Tufts University, she came back to Laramie to be with her husband and took a job as a secretary at the Bank of Wyoming to earn a little money. Jack Richard, head of the political science department, asked whether she would be interested in working as a sabbatical replacement for one of the professors who taught Eastern European politics. So with very little lead time, she had to prepare three new classes: one on American government with 200 students; another on Eastern European politics; and a third one on comparative administrative systems. She asked, “What is that?” The answer she got was, “Whatever you want.” Richard explained that the department needed to keep the course on the books, but that she could teach it anyway she wanted. She kept just one step ahead of her students in those first classes, but “that was lots of fun.”

Murdock kept substituting for faculty on sabbatical leave until 1977, when her husband, now a newly minted lawyer, made the jump to Casper to practice—and where UW had just launched a new upper division program. There, she taught all the political science and criminal justice classes. As UW sought to reach students farther afield, Murdock began offering distance classes. At that time, none of the technology we take for granted today was available. They only had audio teleconferencing and they mostly taught at night. When video conferencing came out—as rotten as it was in the 1990s—“we thought we were in heaven because we could see our students from all around the state.”

Murdock participated in most of UW’s distance-ed programs, but a fear of flying in small planes kept her out of the UW “Flying Professor Program” during the 1970s and the 1980s. In a forerunner to Saturday U., the plane would leave Laramie at 3 p.m., arriving in Casper at around 4 p.m., where Laramie professors would get off and Casper professors got on to continue onto Gillette and Sheridan to teach classes. The classes would last three hours (7–10 p.m.) and everyone would be back home by midnight. She was invited to join, but she said she would drive to Douglas instead.

So to reach the people of Wyoming, Murdock taught audio courses and drove to locations around the state to meet her students. She even taught criminal procedure, constitutional rights and liberties, and political violence classes to students serving time at the Wyoming State Penitentiary in Rawlins. Several prisoners got involved in the Outreach School distance learning programs because Pell grants were then available to prisoners. The warden at the state penitentiary at that time, Duane Shillinger, was quite open to having his prisoners take classes. One of Murdock’s students was in the maximum-security section of the prison, and, as Murdock recalls, he was absolutely brilliant. They talked a lot on the phone, and he said that he needed to be in prison; he explained it was safer for everybody. For his final project, this same prisoner received permission from Warden Shillinger to research why there was so little violence at the Wyoming penitentiary. What the student found was corroborated by many other studies: “that in Wyoming, we’re treated with respect,” and the mutual respect shown by both prison guards and inmates reduced incidents of violence.

Most of Murdock’s distance students were working adults with lives and families outside of the classroom and, because she taught criminal justice as well as political science classes, she had many in-service law enforcement officers as well. “So, I’ve had a lot of interesting students.”
Murdock recounted that in the early days of the Wyoming State Election Year Survey (at that time conducted by the political science department under the leadership of Dr. Ollie Walter), the department would take a group of students from town to town to interview people. In Casper, the students and faculty would all end with a spaghetti dinner at Murdock’s house when they completed the work. Today it’s all done by telephone, but going out into the field created a great deal of camaraderie.

In 1990, Murdock was promoted to Dean of the University of Wyoming Casper College Center, where she served until 2000. In 2001, Murdock was appointed as Dean of the Outreach School, where she served until 2013. In teaching distance classes and as Outreach School dean, Murdock insisted on the personal, human touch.

One of her philosophies at Outreach was that the delivery method needed to fit with the discipline. Early in her career, she was often told, “Just tape the classes.” She said no. While more efficient, she didn’t think it was more effective: “A taped lecture can’t replace personal interaction.” In the end, the Outreach School was a national leader in distance education because it had a great philosophy: whether in Jackson, Gillette, or Laramie, all Outreach students were UW students wherever they were located.

Murdock continues to support UW political science students wherever they may be with the Nick and Maggi Murdock Endowment for Excellence.

Newest SPPAIS Member: Dr. Zoe Pearson

I joined the international studies faculty at UW in fall 2016. As a human geographer by training, my research and teaching revolve around questions of how places come to be through global processes and interconnections, how people “know” the world, and how nature and society are produced through environment-human interactions. My work is inherently interdisciplinary, informed by scholarship from geography, anthropology, political economy, drug studies, Latin American studies, feminist theory, political ecology, history, and political theory.

I’m currently working on three research projects. The first is a study of Bolivia’s contemporary coca and cocaine control policies and practices, and the country’s rejection of the “drug war” in the Andes. The second is an interdisciplinary team-based and multi-sited project investigating recent social, political, and environmental changes taking place in rural Central America as a result of cocaine transshipment. Finally, I am collaborating with an undergraduate honors student to study competing territorial and resource governance practices in the Ecuadorian Amazon. In different ways, all of my research centers around natural resources and conflicts (involving transnational actors) surrounding their use, control, and governance—and the environmental and social justice issues that emerge as a result.

I teach classes that reflect my research interests, including intro to Latin American studies, drug war geopolitics in the Americas, global political ecology, and politics of natural resources in Latin America. And I strive to make all of my classes relevant to issues and places beyond the material we cover in class. I really enjoy teaching students at all levels, and working with both undergraduates and graduate students on research, as well as on professionalization issues. I have found the students at UW to be thoughtful and curious about the world, and really excellent to work with, so I’m thrilled to be at UW as a member of SPPAIS.
Professor Rides Along with Cleveland Police

The School’s Dr. Justin Piccorelli traveled to Cleveland, Ohio, which is facing a heroin epidemic, in late June to work side-by-side with police officers to investigate the city’s new pilot program to combat drug addition. Piccorelli rode along with officers who had been given crisis intervention training and issued Narcan (a prescription that blocks the effect of opioids) in an effort to better meet the needs of the public. Along with the two social workers, they were the first responders to situations recognized as involving the mentally ill or drug addicted. These situations resemble “wicked problems” in public administration and often require a unique solution like this joint task-force. Several experiences have been incorporated into Piccorelli’s phenomenological research related to crisis intervention training provided to police, the development and use of aesthetic judgment, and the idea of the spectator. Piccorelli is grateful to the City of Cleveland Police for this opportunity and will not forget the camaraderie felt while there.

UW Hosts the Public Administration Theory Network Annual Conference

From June 1–4, 2017 the School hosted the Annual Public Administration Theory Network Conference at the Hilton Garden Inn in Laramie, Wyoming. The conference brought close to 80 faculty, practitioners, and students into town to present current research in the field and to engage in dialogue. UW President Laurie Nichols opened proceedings with a discussion of UW’s management and administration and Professor Rob Godby in the economics department gave the keynote address on the management of Wyoming’s economy. The School’s very own Prof. Justin Piccorelli presented on crisis intervention training for police and phenomenology, while Prof. Gregg Cawley presented on “narrative evolution and the question of extinction,” insisting he was “perfectly okay with being on the downside of the evolutionary curve.” A detailed conference program can be found here: http://www.patheory.net/pdf/17conf/program.pdf. The Milward L. Simpson fund and Cawley helped make this event great.
Judge McKeown Speaks to Students

Casper native The Honorable M. Margaret McKeown (INST ’72) of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit was honored as one of UW’s Distinguished Alumni and came to speak to international studies seniors during Homecoming.

McKeown, a possible nominee for the U.S. Supreme Court, has extensive experience in all three branches of government having worked on Capitol Hill as well as a White House fellow from 1980 until 1981, serving as special assistant to the Secretary of the Interior under the Carter administration.

Named one of the “50 Most Influential Women Lawyers in the United States” by the National Law Journal, McKeown earned her law degree from Georgetown University.

McKeown explained to international studies seniors that she was interested in the subject because she wanted to know the world beyond Wyoming. She still works in international affairs by chairing the American Bar Association’s Rule of Law Initiative in Morocco, which promotes judicial integrity, establishes legal clinics, and strengthens the national anti-corruption regime.

Student Corner

Left: Students enjoying the new student alcoves with pillows for comfy studying!

Middle: “I think SPPAIS is great because it lets students explore domestic politics as well as international relations/studies. I think both are incredibly complex and different from each other, but they also influence each other and have many similarities. The merger has allowed for students not only to step outside their comfort zone in taking new classes and learning new ideas, but has also allowed for new perspectives, which can be lost in a narrow focus. The new school is great.”

—Jonet Jennings, (POLS/INST ’18)

Right: “The SPPAIS has allowed me to delve into my concentrations by having better access to a greater variety of professors and opportunities. I’ve been able to explore new topics with new people that I would have had limited contact with beforehand; the merger has given me a comprehensive background with a solid network of contacts, and I feel much more prepared for a post-graduate education.”

—Dimitri Nesbitt, (INST ’18)
Hello from Indonesia!

It feels natural and satisfyingly normal to wake up every morning knowing this is precisely what I am meant to do and where I am meant to be. As I write this, it's officially one month since I arrived in Indonesia. The first month was a tedious waiting game with immigration bureaucracy, but it gave me time to sketch out the full and bright (Fulbright) year ahead.

Along with the Fulbright student researcher title, I was granted the critical language enhancement award (CLEA). This means a three-month Indonesian language course in the city of Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia. Salatiga is similar to Laramie because it's a walkable college town, except there's a majestic dormant volcano as a backdrop.

Afterwards, I'll begin 2018 in the picturesque clear blue, coral reef rich waters of Wakatobi National Park in Sulawesi, Indonesia. I am partnering with Dr. Hartuti Purnaweni, who is the Ph.D. director of environmental studies at Universitas Diponegoro. We are researching environmental policy and management in two national marine parks: Wakatobi and Karimunjawa. This includes a great amount of scuba diving and island hopping for data collection. While in Wakatobi, I plan to finish the last two levels of scuba diving certification, which means I will be acquiring another master’s certification soon. The World Wildlife Foundation, my dream job, has an office in Wakatobi. I plan to create a rapport for research and potential volunteer opportunities.

Fulbright’s core mission is to create mutual understanding between partnering countries. I am a cultural ambassador for the United States. As a first generation Vietnamese-American with a “light” complexion, my origin is consistently mistaken for Japan, China, or Singapore. I wear “western” fashion, yet my face is not usually associated with America. My face is Asian, yet I am American? Apparently, this is an interesting concept. Seems like I will also be spending the next year explaining that, despite pop culture and media, Asian Americans exist in the U.S.

In the end, all of this could not have happened without the guidance from the extraordinary faculty at the University of Wyoming. Specifically, I want to thank the SPPAIS faculty, the Center for Global Studies, and the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources for making me aware of the Fulbright program, for providing me with financial support, and for all the emotional labor that comes with advising graduate students.
The School has been very fortunate to welcome a whole host of speakers to our campus! In April, Baroness Catherine Ashton, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy spoke to students about foreign affairs and her personal experience as a woman in the highest echelons of government. Of her visit, she said, “It is a great honour to visit the University of Wyoming and to have the chance to talk with academic staff, students, and the people of Wyoming.”

In September, SPPAIS welcomed Phi Beta Kappa visiting scholar, Harvard Professor Stephen Walt, one of the world’s most influential authors on international relations. In this photo, he is discussing with our students the question “Where is U.S. Foreign Policy Headed?”

Professor Jim King moderated a panel on “Law and Politics” where politicians discussed how they used their legal careers to become lawmakers and leaders. King is pictured with Wyoming Secretary of State Ed Murray.

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As a junior in the International Studies major, I applied to the Pathways Program, which gives student the opportunity to live and work as a full-time State Department employee before they graduate. The program was created during the Obama administration as a means of career development and mentorship for those with keen interest in pursuing a civil service career. Interns are spread across the Department of State in every bureau, and each position attracts candidates specific to office needs and focus.

To my pleasure, I was offered a position with the Global Support Strategy Program for the Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of the Executive Director, Post Analysis and Support Division. The office engages with overseas embassies and consulates, and aids in monitoring the visa process. From this position, I have had the most amazing vantage point to observe the effects of the Executive Orders and visa suspensions on consular operations, as well as watch the large task forces deployed during this hurricane season. I can now strongly recommend others to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) when traveling in case a disaster of any sorts hits the area!

As a freshman at UW, I would never have imagined that I would spend the final year of my undergraduate career working for the Department of State—an agency I had only ever dreamed about. With the support of the international studies faculty, this dream has come to fruition. Not only have the professors advised me in my courses, but they have also taken the time to discuss with me personally my long-term goals and the means of achieving them through internships, exchanges, and scholarships. With UW’s support, I was able to study abroad in France and intern with the State Department for a full semester, giving me an advantage when I applied for this program. The international studies major has truly enabled me to pursue my interests, both academically and professionally. 

Go Pokes!

Maggie Huss, INST ’18

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