

COJO receives science reporting grant



Kristen Landreville

One of the largest grants ever awarded to the University of Wyoming is helping to improve science journalism in a state where few science journalists live.

Wyoming EPSCoR received a five-year, \$20 million grant from the National Science Foundation in 2017.

According to Kristen Landreville, the investigator overseeing the science

journalism part of the grant, it is aimed at boosting microbial biology research that occurs throughout Wyoming.

Mapping the state's microbiome — a world of impossibly tiny creatures that impact every other element of the environment — is vital to understanding Wyoming's wild spaces.

But most residents know little about this microbial universe or the research exploring it. Nearly \$200,000 of the grant is dedicated to science journalism initiatives, giving both reporters and scientists the training they need to communicate about the often difficult-to-parse world of science.

One highlight of these science journalism initiatives is the summer internship program, which pairs aspiring Wyoming journalists with local news organizations and media outlets. Landreville, associate professor in the Department of Communication and Journalism, said the internship program provides essential training and networking opportunities for fledgling reporters, while assisting local or statewide papers, magazines, and radio programs.

"Students are working right alongside our Wyoming news editors, reporters, and photographers," Landreville said. "It also helps local Wyoming news outlets keep up with the busy summer news season. Publishing more stories about science and agriculture is good for the state."

During Summer 2019, seven UW students produced about 50 science stories (in addition to even more general news stories) that might not have been written without the internship program.

The grant also provides science reporting workshops at the annual Wyoming Press Association conference and for a science reporting award open to reporters at WPA-affiliated papers. The award, and its attendant cash prize of \$500, encouraged more than 50 submissions from about a dozen Wyoming journalists.

Landreville is now recruiting for the 2020 science journalism internship program, seeking once again to pair up-and-coming writers with news outlets across the state. The grant will continue to enhance and expand the state of science reporting in Wyoming during its five-year run.

Science internships successful in first year

The seven UW students who took part in the science journalism internship program worked across Wyoming, from the *Sheridan Press* to the *Casper Star-Tribune* to *Wyoming Public Radio* in Laramie.

These part-time reporters took on the challenge of interpreting the jargon-heavy and famously nuanced world of scientific research for a lay audience.

This effort to bridge the gap between everyday citizens and highly specialized scientists has positive impacts on public knowledge and support for science.

For journalism major Mary Rucinski, the internship offered a chance to do some "real-world" reporting.

"In a lot of my classes, I learned how to write a proper journalistic piece, but the rigor of having a job in journalism was something I did not learn," she said. "While at the *Boomerang*, I was able to see how much the reporters write on a daily basis and how much effort goes into each paper."

Graduate student Sara Teter's internship was a little different from the rest.

She wrote for *Western Confluence*, a science-focused publication produced by UW's Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources.

Teter's summer consisted of travelling with scientists into the field and working with them to craft detailed, but easy-to-understand, features about their research.

"This internship gave me firsthand experience in science journalism, and I gained the skills to accurately and engagingly present science to a lay audience," she said.

UW Debate welcomes its new coach, Matt Liu

The Department of Communication and Journalism welcomed a new director this semester — a debater and coach with two decades of experience.

Matt Liu was hired as an assistant lecturer at the outset of the Fall 2019 semester, and is now guiding UW's debate teams through what's turning out to be a successful season.

"We've been in the finals of three tournaments, including the Rocky Mountain Championships at Denver," Liu said. "And we've won two tournaments, the Carroll College Tournament and the Casper tournament."

Wyoming also won the Junior Varsity division at the University of Texas in San Antonio, and beat Harvard at the Wake Forest University Tournament.

"We're pretty happy with the performance so far and we're looking forward to more good things."

Liu attended the University of Mary Washington and Wake Forest University, and spent the last five years working on a doctorate at the University of Minnesota and helping its debate team.

He also has experience in Wyoming. Former debate director Travis Cram hired him to help teach at Wyoming's debate summer camp for high school students, which is a program Liu hopes to bring back.

Fresh off his first semester, Liu launched Wyoming Debate Roundup, an online forum dedicated to improving debate strategies and techniques.

"It's a website dedicated to providing quality debate content to Wyoming high school debaters," he said. "We focus on

topic analysis and how to build public speaking and argument skills."

UW Debate is divided into two teams: Policy Debate and British Parliamentary Debate, commonly called BP.

While policy debate entails deep research and detailed nuance, those on the BP team are handed topics just minutes before they are expected to debate.

Both formats require dedicated research and practice.

Both teams have their eye on national championships, and Liu said the most dedicated debaters are putting in the work to qualify.

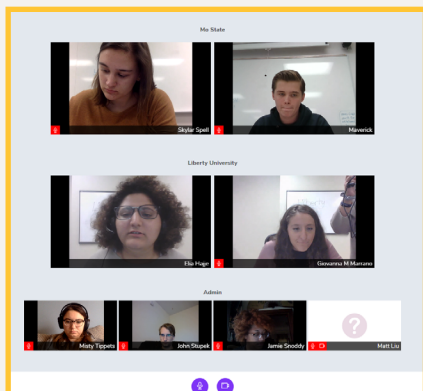
"Not everyone puts in the superhuman effort to qualify for the National Debate Tournament, and we care about those people too," Liu said. "Their goal may just be significant improvement over the year at regional tournaments."

In addition to qualifying for and competing at nationals, UW Debate is also looking to recruit more undergraduates and graduates to join the team. Liu is also building bridges with high school debaters through Wyoming Debate Roundup.



Matt Liu

Online tournament boosts debate opportunities



UW Debate's new online tournament gives debaters throughout the mountain region another shot at squaring off against other schools.

Wyoming is far from the beaten path, and that means fewer opportunities for UW Debate to square off against other colleges.

While varsity debaters can sometimes fly to far-off competitions, that's simply not an option for the JV and novice debaters who make up the bulk of the team.

UW Debate Coach Matt Liu said that leaves them at a disadvantage when it comes to nationals.

"There aren't a lot of tournaments that are closer than 10 hours away from Wyoming," Liu said. "And I just didn't feel like they had an adequate schedule to make them as prepared as debaters from the East Coast will be at the end of the year."

So Liu led UW Debate in hosting an online tournament, during which UW

students and students from other colleges used videoconferencing to debate as they traditionally would in person.

"It was a pilot project to expand JV and novice debate in the mountain region," Liu said. "And it was, in my opinion, a successful pilot project. We plan to host it again next year and to expand the tournament."

The tourney gave debaters experience, rounds, and feedback — but it's no replacement for in-person tournaments, Liu said.

"It's the first full online tournament that's ever been hosted in college policy debate," he said. "So, it was something we pioneered."

New assistant lecturer is familiar face



Mitzi Stewart

The Department of Communication and Journalism has a new assistant lecturer, one who is very familiar with the University of Wyoming and the department. Before becoming a

permanent member of the COJO faculty, Stewart was already teaching journalism and communication classes, and supervising media writing graduate assistants.

Mitzi Stewart earned her bachelor's and master's degrees as a student in the COJO Department. Since then, she has worked at UW, lecturing and guiding students for more than a decade.

"As a temporary lecturer, I was on a four-four load, so that means I would teach four classes a semester, and I worked in conjunction with the LeaRN Program," she says.

UW's LeaRN encompasses a wide range of programs geared toward academic success and engagement. Stewart was an instructor

for the Bridge program — formally known as Synergy — which provides assistance for provisionally admitted students.

"It's a learning community," Stewart says. "Students are put into two cohorts that take a bunch of the same freshman classes together. They have small class sizes so they get to know their instructors a little bit more. The idea is that that learning community helps retain those students."

Stewart's new position doesn't include teaching classes for LeaRN, but it does afford her the chance to continue working closely with students through advising.

"I'm really happy to have more connection with our COJO majors," Stewart says.

"I'm excited to get more exposure to students that way, and have more conversations like 'What do you want to do?' and 'What type of internships are you interested in?'"

The new position allows Stewart to serve on committees in a more formal way, and will see her teaching Mass Media and Society this spring.

"That will be a class we haven't had on a regular basis now being taught again," she says.

Stewart's thesis work centered on the formation of parasocial relationships.

Her communication interests include journalism, media writing, the history of American journalism, and professional and business communication.

Alumni artwork wanted for new Ross Hall seminar room

Faculty, students and others related to the Department of Communication and Journalism will soon have a new meeting space to call their own.

The room overlooks Prexy's Pasture from the fourth floor of Ross Hall, and the department is hoping to decorate the new space with photography and artwork from its alumni.

"This is going to be a showcase space where students will be able to learn or present their own research," Department Head Cindy Price Schultz said. "What better way for them to learn than to see the photographic talents of alumni who graduated from the same department they are in!"

Room 427/428 is being transformed into a conference/seminar room where members of the department can host smaller classes or meetings.

The space will include a projector and



Department Head Cindy Price Schultz and Larsh Bristol Fellow Michael Gjellum hang his donated artwork in the new Ross Hall conference room.

white board, and can also be used for prospectus and thesis defenses.

If you would like to honor the COJO Department with your work, please contact Price Schultz at cprice@uwyo.edu.

The department will recognize each contributor with a description of the work, and the person's name and year of graduation.

Thanks in advance for your help!