URIs graduate students are helping to build a higher profile for the university’s College of the Environment and Life Sciences through a unique partnership with Metcalf Institute.

College of the Environment and Life Sciences (CELS) Dean John Kirby established the CELS Communications Fellowship in 2014. Each year, two graduate students gain hands-on science communication experience by interviewing, gathering information for stories, and writing for the CELS website, social media accounts and newsletter. Metcalf Institute Communication Director Karen Southern oversees the program and mentors the students.

The CELS Fellowship is aligned with Metcalf Institute’s strategic goal of developing collaborations across URI that profit from Metcalf’s expertise in science communication training and the university’s extensive research projects.

Southern selects and supervises the CELS Fellows, teaching communication skills and providing guidance as they learn how to develop compelling content for the college.

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Working Together Across Disciplines

The CELS Fellowship is one of several partnerships that have strengthened both Metcalf and URI. Enrollment in the Career Development Program spans engineering, oceanography, chemistry, marine affairs and geosciences. The Annual Science Immersion Workshop for Journalists has introduced journalists to world-class research at URI in water quality, fisheries, hurricane modeling, climate change, and forestry. URI faculty, staff, and students have learned how to engage with public audiences more effectively at Metcalf science communication training programs. Metcalf’s Inclusive SciComm Symposium at URI brings together practitioners and scholars across diverse science communication settings to center equity and inclusion in their work.

NEWS & UPDATES

Fall Career Workshops

As students and professionals find themselves with overflowing inboxes and overwhelming virtual schedules, time management has become increasingly important. Dr. Raul Pacheco-Vega, associate professor with the Methods Lab at the Latin American Faculty for Social Sciences in Mexico, taught participants how to handle workloads with effective, project-based strategies in Metcalf’s Time Management Workshop on September 22.

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the many challenges of talking about scientific research. It can be hard for scientists to handle questions about uncertainties in research from members of the press, family and friends, and even other researchers. Dr. Jean Goodwin, distinguished professor of communication and member of the Leadership in Public Science cluster at North Carolina State University, presented targeted methods in the CDP workshop, Meeting the Challenge of Communicating Scientific Uncertainty, on October 16.

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Graduate Fellowship Channels Expertise

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The Fellows write articles promoting CELS research and profiles that feature faculty, staff, students, and alumni as part of the monthly Big Thinkers series (uri.edu/cels/big-thinkers). They also work on Metcalf projects, conducting research, writing profiles of Metcalf alumni, and promoting journalists’ news stories via social media.

“Participating in the CELS Communications Fellowship was one of the most worthwhile experiences of my life,” says Morgan Devlin, staff scientist at Langan Engineering & Environmental Science and 2016 CELS alumnus. “Learning to write for varied audiences—not just the scientific community—has been very useful on the job.”

“By crafting Big Thinker articles month after month, I refined my ability to write clearly and concisely for diverse audiences,” says Rita Lavoie, 2017 CELS alumna and GIS manager and principal planner for the Town of Middletown, RI. “I am humbled by the encouragement, personal support, and professional training I received in the CELS fellowship.”

As the CELS Communications Fellows work to strengthen their communication and marketing skills, Metcalf Institute will continue working in collaboration with URI to grow the next generation of science communicators.

NEWS & UPDATES

Seeking the Best Possible Future

From COVID-19 to climate change, the global crises we face today often demand our urgent and immediate attention, making it hard to think ahead. Metcalf Institute, in partnership with the Institute at Brown for Environment & Society, hosted a virtual conversation with alumna Bina Venkataraman, editorial page editor for The Boston Globe and former senior advisor for climate change in the Obama White House. Venkataraman shared advice from her book, The Optimist’s Telescope: Thinking Ahead in a Reckless Age about how to find a more optimistic perspective on global issues and our own futures.

In conversation with David Boardman, dean of the Klein College of Media and Communication at Temple University, she stressed the importance of cultivating strategies to balance the near-term focus, which so often guides our decision-making, with planning ahead so we can forge a healthier future for ourselves, our communities, and our planet.