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'Future of Ice' initiative marks new era for UW polar research

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News and Information

The Northwest has long been a hub for Alaska-bound fishing vessels and scientific study of the Arctic.

The University of Washington's new "**Future of Ice**" initiative seeks to build on that research in a region now undergoing rapid changes. The initiative includes several new hires, a new minor in Arctic studies and a winter lecture series.

Free screening of the documentary "**Chasing Ice**": 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, Jan. 7 in Kane 120.

Talk by photographer James Balog: "**When Mountains Move**," 6:30 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 8 in Kane 130.

Register [online](#). The first two events are full in registration but seats will be available on a first-come basis.

"This is partly recognizing how much is going on in polar research at the UW," said initiative director **Eric Steig**, a UW professor of Earth and space sciences who studies ice cores. "This initiative is designed to bring more visibility, integration and investment in an area that is experiencing dramatic changes."

The UW College of the Environment will hire **three tenure-track faculty positions** in polar research, while the UW Applied Physics Laboratory will hire two or three **research scientists**. The two units, along with the Quaternary Research Center, will hire up to three joint **postdoctoral researchers** for interdisciplinary work relating to polar science.

"This initiative is about building the pipeline, attracting new talent and promoting collaboration so the UW can continue to be a strong player in high-latitude research," said **Axel Schweiger**, chair of the Applied Physics Laboratory's Polar Science Center.

A winter quarter public lecture series, organized with support from the UW Graduate School and the Alumni Association, will feature UW faculty and off-campus experts.



Among those attending the talks will be UW undergraduates doing a winter quarter class based around the series. Roughly 30 students will meet with the speakers and do coursework around each topic, ranging from Arctic governance to the marine organisms that live in sea ice.

Students in that course will be earning the first credits toward the new, interdisciplinary Arctic studies minor, pending UW faculty council approval. The minor, which is open to students in all departments, is being led by Nadine Fabbi of the UW Canadian Studies Center, Vincent Gallucci of aquatic and fishery sciences, Rebecca Woodgate from the UW Applied Physics Laboratory and Jody Deming from oceanography.

The initiative and minor also include faculty from international studies, Earth sciences, anthropology, law, policy and the Burke Museum.

Over time, the initiative seeks to connect researchers from across campus and create a central hub for polar education and scholarship.

“Our goal is to bring together people working on different pieces that help us to understand the connections, to provide better insight into policy decisions and give communities a better understanding of their options,” said initiative co-director Ben Fitzhugh, a UW associate professor of anthropology. Fitzhugh’s archaeological studies in Northern communities reveal how early people developed the adaptations that made it possible for humans to live in very cold and highly seasonal environments.

The Future of Ice initiative’s first large research event will be a spring workshop, supported by the UW College of the Environment, that brings together UW faculty, colleagues, industry experts, non-governmental organizations, Arctic leaders and others to discuss research priorities.

“The reason for creating a College of the Environment was to achieve new levels of integration,” said [Lisa Graumlich](#), dean of the college. “The UW has tremendous depth in Arctic research, and it’s shared among a number of units. Pulling these threads together will allow researchers to take their scholarship to the next level, and more closely connect it to policy – a key component of the vision for our college.”

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