

'Future of Ice' Initiative Prepares Students for Leadership in the Arctic

Through the ["Future of Ice" Initiative](#), the University of Washington is leveraging faculty expertise and making new investments to build a pipeline of thinkers, researchers and leaders focused on Arctic regional issues. Eight countries hold territory within the region, but a changing landscape due to rapidly melting sea ice is attracting attention from new international players. With its unique resources and interdisciplinary expertise related to the Arctic, UW is uniquely positioned to make an impact through teaching, research and collaborative partnerships.



Garrett Knoll, undergraduate student, at his shark booth at the Polar Science Weekend (04/2014).

Undergraduates Garrett Knoll and Walter O'Toole and graduate student Erica Escajeda are three of a growing group of UW students preparing for diverse leadership roles in the changing Arctic.

Unique resources

Erica is first-year graduate student conducting thesis research on the Polar Bears of Baffin Island, Canada.

UW offers her the opportunity to be mentored by outstanding faculty and participate in specialized research. "What really drew me to the UW was Dr. Lairdre's research at the [Polar Science Center](#). It's an incredible resource, and the research is cutting edge."

Without Dr. Lairdre's connections in Canada and Greenland, she adds, "I would not be able to travel to the Arctic at all during the course of my master's research due to funding constraints."

An English major, Walter is expanding his understanding of the Arctic by studying Inuktitut, an Inuit language spoken in tribal communities in the Canadian Arctic. He and one other student – a Foreign Language & Area Studies Fellow in Inuktitut and aspiring environmental lawyer – study with two instructors, a language expert and a native speaker from Canada.

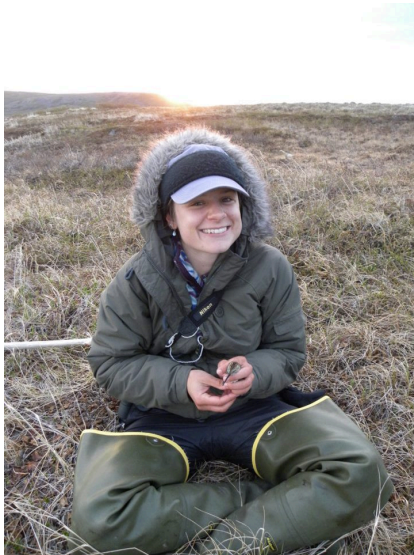
"Inuktitut is quite different than any other class I've taken UW," he says, "There are only two students, so that makes for a lot of interaction with our professors. It's mostly done over Skype, which can be spotty at times, but without videoconferencing I wouldn't even have the opportunity to learn Inuktitut. Both [instructors] are accomplished Inuktitut linguists."

An interdisciplinary approach

Through UW's "Future of Ice" course this winter quarter, led by instructors Nadine Fabbi and Eric Steig, Walter, Garrett and Erica are engaging with six Polar region experts, including

scientists, political and indigenous leaders and wildlife photographers. Each guest provides a new and different perspective on changes facing northern regions.

“I really like how the class brings in the top people from a variety of fields all having to do with the Polar Regions,” Garrett explains, “An interdisciplinary perspective is essential to a topic like the Arctic because it involves so many different fields and ways of thinking. You have to have a grasp on all of them in order to understand the whole picture.”



Erica Escajeda, graduate student, in Nome, Alaska (04/2014).

Erica is excited to broaden her knowledge of the political, cultural and scientific issues surrounding the Arctic.

“Interdisciplinary courses like the ‘Future of Ice’ instill a deeper sense of collaboration, and hopefully inspire students to think outside of their fields. The lessons I’ve learned from the course are readily connected to my own research and career goals.”

Walter is pursuing the unique [Arctic Studies minor](#) jointly offered by the [Jackson School of International Studies](#) and the [School of Oceanography](#). The interdisciplinary minor provides cultural, political and scientific perspectives on the rapidly changing region. “[My instructors’] enthusiasm for my studies in Inuktitut is wonderful; they each are incredibly knowledgeable in their fields, and they have been eager to share their knowledge with me, going out of their way to help me expand my awareness of the Arctic.”

Diverse directions

Walter plans to pursue graduate studies in English and make a career teaching and writing. “Through the Arctic Minor, I hope gain understanding of the context in which Arctic and Inuit literatures are created, an understanding that could enable me to teach in those areas.”

Erica’s career trajectory also points north. She is considering teaching or working as a research scientist and biological consultant on Arctic issues.

An Aquatic & Fisheries science major “hooked on Arctic Studies”, Garrett is using his science training to educate the public about a little known Arctic species, the Greenland shark. For his capstone project, Garrett designed an interactive game that teaches kids about the animal by inviting them to pick out plastic animals they think the shark would eat.

Garrett shared his game at the Pacific Science Center's [Polar Science Weekend](#). His dedication won't stop there. "After I graduate I hope to get involved with outreach programs that get kids interested in science by taking them out into the field and showing them the incredible animals that inhabit our world."

-Sara Stubbs, Office of Global Affairs