Metcalf Donors Contribute to Global Conversation

Want to know how your donation to Metcalf Institute helps to improve public understanding of important environmental issues and scientific findings? Our recent inquiry into the reach of Metcalf science training for journalists provided an impressive finding. Based on the circulation of their news outlets, Metcalf alumni have the potential to reach tens of millions of news consumers worldwide every day, delivering stories that convey environmental issues with scientific accuracy, clarity, and deeper insights. Their reporting goes beyond the traditional point-counterpoint approach of many news outlets.

Journalists at Metcalf’s Annual Science Immersion Workshop tell us…

“I have more grounding in the scientific process, which allows me to better explain scientific concepts to my listeners.”

“I’ve come away with new tools to do my job better, which means the public will be better informed about environmental realities and the related policy decisions that affect their lives.”

Metcalf Climate Change and the News science seminars alumni say…

“Invaluable for editors who need to be able to assess reporters’ ideas and ensure accurate reporting”

“Almost everything people will hear about climate will come from either journalists or politicians. The importance of helping at least one of those groups do a better job can hardly be overstated.”

Exit surveys from communication workshops for scientists also reveal that Metcalf improves researchers’ abilities and confidence in reaching out to non-scientific audiences. Scientists and resource managers report…

“I find that regardless of the importance of our research, it has increased value if it can be shared with students and the general public.”

“I think [workshops like Metcalf’s] should be offered at every natural resource management conference. Often we are so overwhelmed with the gigantic task of managing the resource that we shy away from the nuance and challenge associated with improving communication. The opportunity a workshop like this provides is invaluable.”

Donor contributions allow Metcalf Institute to achieve these widespread impacts on science-based news reporting, communication of scientific research, and public engagement with today’s pressing environmental concerns.

News & Updates

Rhode Island, like many other states, is striving to build its economy and increase its competitive edge while working to overcome environmental challenges. As part of the Peter B. Lord Seminars on the Environment, Metcalf hosted a lecture and panel discussion in June, in partnership with The Providence Journal, on the interdependence between a strong economy, innovative energy policy and a healthy environment.

In July, Metcalf partnered with Ocean Media Institute on a Science Communication Workshop for scientists on creating videos about their research. Supported by RI NSF Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research, the workshop built skills in visual storytelling and interviewing techniques.

Coming Up This Fall

New England journalists will attend a Peter B. Lord Seminar, September 30, funded in part by Rhode Island Sea Grant and the URI Coastal Institute, on the role of marine aquaculture in the regional economy and environment. Speakers will discuss industry trends, new research on water quality related to aquaculture and how conflicts are resolved between local residents and aquaculture operations.

The successful SciComm Exchange series will continue with a luncheon conversation for scientists, October 15, on giving scientific testimony before legislative and executive committees. Experts will advise Rhode Island researchers in effective ways to discuss their science and avoid pitfalls.

Rounding out Metcalf’s training for 2015 will be a Climate Change and the News seminar in Boston, November 4, on how stakeholders are meeting the challenges of sea level rise and extreme weather events with better assessment, planning and design. Participating journalists will also gain insights from their veteran colleagues on how to cover this complex and increasingly relevant story. With funding from The Grantham Foundation for the Protection of the Environment and in-kind support from the Association of Climate Change Officers (ACCO), Metcalf will offer the seminar in conjunction with ACCO’s 2015 Rising Seas Summit.
The phrase “think global, act local” has real meaning at Metcalf Institute. We know that news audiences are not only looking for information about the big picture of science and the environment, on national and global scales, but also for a clearer understanding of conditions and impacts in their communities.

Journalists looking for new ideas and angles to cover the environment for their audiences need training that takes the regional approach. Two of Metcalf Institute’s seminar series meet this demand: the Peter B. Lord Seminars on the Environment and Climate Change and the News.

The Peter Lord Seminars, named for the late Providence Journal environment reporter and longtime advisor to Metcalf Institute, examines the science behind key environmental issues in Rhode Island and southern New England.

The Climate Change and the News seminars look at research on climate impacts across the U.S., including, to date, the Pacific Northwest, the Great Lakes, mid-Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay. In the future, we plan to offer these seminars in the desert Southwest, Gulf of Mexico, Rocky Mountain West, and southern Atlantic states.

The Metcalf seminars aim to provide reporters with a wide range of regional contacts and story ideas based on the latest research. Scientists from agencies and academic institutions and speakers representing business, local government, and nonprofit organizations give short presentations, with ample time for journalists to ask questions and then follow up after the seminar.

With adequate financial support for the programs, speaker presentations can be video-recorded and posted online so that journalists who are unable to attend can learn about research findings, policy implications, and economic perspectives on environmental topics in their regions via the Metcalf website and YouTube channel.

The regional approach to science training has been successful, as measured by the stories our alumni produce following the seminars, as well as by the increase in their confidence in talking to scientists and pitching stories to their editors.

As freelance reporter Debi McCarthy put it after Metcalf’s September 2014 seminar in Chicago, “climate change is frequently perceived as an amorphous future state. Effective reporting has to focus on current climate change effects that are locally relevant. This seminar provided both valuable knowledge and access to regional experts that are key to writing stories the public will care about.”

Advisory Board Updates

The Metcalf Advisory Board welcomed new member Gail A. Ginnett in June. Ginnett is a non-profit consultant with 40 years of experience in retail and commercial banking and wealth management at Fleet Financial Group and Citizens Bank and four years as senior development officer at the Rhode Island Foundation. She is a long time board member of Save the Bay and serves on the William Hall Library board, Providence’s Lincoln School Planned Giving advisory committee and the Rhode Island Partnership for Philanthropic Planning. She holds a B.A. from Wheaton College.

Dr. Tatiana Rynearson, professor at URI’s Graduate School of Oceanography (GSO), has completed two terms as science co-director, a volunteer advisory position for Metcalf, and now serves on the board. Dr. Rebecca Robinson, faculty at URI GSO and current board member, was appointed to serve as Metcalf’s new science co-director.

Susan Farady, faculty in Ocean Studies and Marine Affairs at the University of New England, turned over the vice chair reigns to board member Fraser Lang, co-publisher of The Block Island Times, in June.

We are grateful for the many contributions of the volunteer advisory board, particularly those who serve in officer and advisory positions.

Reception Celebrates Metcalf’s Past and Future

Following the June 25 public lecture and panel discussion in The Providence Journal auditorium, Metcalf Institute held a gathering at the Journal library for invited guests to learn about the Institute’s work to extend the legacy of namesake Michael P. Metcalf and The Providence Journal. We extend special thanks to Journal executive editor and Institute board member, Karen Bordeleau, and publisher Janet Hasson for making these historic spaces available for the Metcalf events.

Your tax-deductible gift to the Fund for URI: Metcalf Institute, GSO can be made by check, credit card, or on the secure web site for the URI Foundation, www.urifoundation.org/giveonline. To discuss donations via securities, real estate, or to make a lasting legacy via a bequest, please contact the URI Foundation at (401) 874-7900.