10 From UA Selected as OpEd Project Fellows

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Ten women from the UA are participating in a national effort to get the voices of female faculty and scientists onto the national stage.

For the fifth year in a row, a cohort from the University will participate in the Tucson Public Voices Fellowship[^1], a program that aims to increase the number of commentary pieces written by women and published in major newspapers, magazines and other media platforms.

The fellowship is part of The OpEd Project[^2], a national initiative aimed at increasing the number of women thought leaders. The Tucson Public Voices Fellowship is sponsored by The OpEd Project, the Women's Foundation of Southern Arizona and the UA.

Since the national program began in 2008, the number of female-authored op-eds has risen: Seven years ago, only 15 percent of published op-eds were written by women, while today it’s 26 percent, according to The OpEd Project.

Since 2013, the Tucson fellowship program has selected up to 20 women from the Tucson and UA communities to participate each year. Fellows meet as a group with journalists who coach them on how to convey their ideas in ways that are interesting to a wide audience, and on the process for pitching their work to editors.

Andrea K. Gerlak[^3], an associate professor in the School of Geography and Development who holds a joint appointment as an associate research professor for the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy[^4], was a fellow during the 2016-17 year. Gerlak published three articles in The Hill[^5] on water policy, her area of research.

Gerlak noted the collaborative nature of the program, and the opportunity to network with other fellows and experts.

"Everybody comes with something they're passionate about," she said. "What the fellowship does is figure out how to say it in an op-ed instead of a 30-page journal article."

Gerlak said she already has seen the benefits of having her perspective reach a much wider audience. People doing their own water policy research have reached out to her for input and she is now more widely viewed as an expert on the topic, she said.

As a Cooperative Extension assistant specialist, current fellow Elise Gornish researches how restoration can be used in arid land vegetation management and climate change scenarios. A core component of her job, she said, is to interact with stakeholders, including ranchers, farmers, governmental agencies and organizations like the Tucson Audubon Society.

"I thought this would be a really good opportunity for learning about how to put together op-eds, which is a good way of reaching stakeholders who might be interested in talking to..."
policymakers or decision-makers," she said.

Gornish’s first op-ed was published last week on a Scientific American blog. The article examines how climate change’s portrayal in the media is stifling discussion about its effects. She has plans to write another, she said, that will explore how raising the entrance fee for U.S. national parks would impact the general public’s relationship with the outdoors, and what effect that would have on discussions surrounding climate change.

Gornish, who hopes to have eight articles published during her fellowship, said she especially values the collegiality of the program.

"It's really, really empowering to meet a bunch of smart women who have a lot to say, and want to learn from one another, and who want to, as corny as it might sound, change the world," she said.

**Cheree L. Meeks**, director of the First Year Experience in the UA Honors College, has studied African-American mothers working in student affairs positions and the intersection of race and gender. She said she became interested in the fellowship after other women she knew went through it.

"It seemed like a way for me to get my voice out there where a perspective like mine might not be shared," she said.

Meeks’ first article, published by Garnet News, discusses what hair represents in African-American culture, and explores the importance of personal space. Meeks said the article calls on personal experiences that involved strangers walking up and touching her and her 5-year-old daughter’s hair.

**Kory Floyd**, faculty director of special initiatives in the Office of the Provost and a professor of communication, serves as co-chair of the fellowship alongside Dawne Bell, CEO of the Women’s Foundation of Southern Arizona.

"It can be easy to privilege certain voices over others and then we end up with a very skewed and narrow exchange of ideas in the public sphere," Floyd said. "That's primarily why it's important for the UA to back a program like this."

The provost office’s involvement in the fellowship is a change that began this year. In previous years, the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences coordinated the UA’s involvement.

"Through this collaborative fellowship, we are bringing University of Arizona experts and Tucson community leaders together and investing in leadership development that is focused on improving the proportion of women's op-ed voices and sharing the fellows' insights and stories," said Provost **Andrew C. Comrie**.

When Gerlak reflects on her time in the fellowship, she has only one regret.

"I would've written more and more” op-eds, she said. "I wish I would've written 10 of them."

The full list of 2017-18 fellows can be found on the [Tucson Public Voices Fellowship](https://www.tucsonpublicvoices.org) website. The UA fellows are:

- **Catherine F. Brooks**, associate director, School of Information
Masha Fedzechkina, assistant professor, Department of Linguistics
Rachel E. Gallery, assistant professor, School of Natural Resources and the Environment
Elise Gornish, Cooperative Extension assistant specialist in ecological restoration, School of Natural Resources and the Environment
Cheree L. Meeks, director of First Year Experience in the Honors College
Maha Nassar, assistant professor, School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies
Elizabeth Oglesby, associate professor, School of Geography and Development
Tracey Osborne, assistant professor, School of Geography and Development
Noshene Ranjbar, assistant professor, College of Medicine Tucson
Michelle Téllez, assistant professor, Department of Mexican American Studies

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Links:
[3] https://geography.arizona.edu/user/andrea-k-gerlak
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