Tucson's OpEd Project Expands Reach, Gives Voice to Women Faculty

University Relations ? Communications
March 2016

Eighty percent of published editorials are written by men, according to research done by the OpEd Project, a national organization focused on increasing the range of voices and ideas heard in the media.

Women in southern Arizona are getting more opportunities to share their voices in news outlets, thanks to The OpEd Project: Tucson Public Voices Fellowship.

In 2013, the Women's Foundation of Southern Arizona partnered with the UA's College of Social and Behavioral Sciences to bring the OpEd Project to Tucson. The program aims to train women to share their expertise through editorials.

The yearlong program pairs each woman with a professional writer, who helps teach them how to effectively communicate their ideas. Participants also attend workshops on a variety of topics, like editing their voices for the public, engaging on social media and how to pitch ideas to news outlets.

John Paul Jones III, dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, said the group is set to publish twice the number of op-eds this year than any other group in the history of the program.

Half of the 20 women involved in the Tucson Public Voices Fellowship group are UA faculty members who use the op-eds to share their expertise on subjects ranging from biology to politics to data to education.

"It's a wonderful opportunity to improve your writing and communication skills, and learn how to effectively join the global conversation and influence public discourse," said Melanie Hingle, assistant professor of nutritional sciences and public health, who is part of the project. "This is particularly important as a woman, as a very small percentage of opinion and editorial contributions are currently authored by women."

Since its beginning in 2013, fellows have published more than 100 editorials in outlets such as The Atlantic, The Washington Post, CNN, the Los Angeles Times, USA Today, ESPN, The Hill, The Huffington Post and more. The impact report for the third year of the fellowship states that 18 of the 20 fellows already have published at least once, and nine of them are on their third or more. This year's fellowship will end in June.

"We are a diverse group of 20 women who come from all walks of life, and the topics my colleagues choose to write about are fascinating," Hingle said. "I've learned a lot."

Hingle's pieces on food waste and how to successfully use health apps have appeared in The Hill.
and the academic journal Medium [5], as well as on PBS Next Avenue [6].

Being published in a major news outlet helps faculty members get exposure.

Phyllis Taoua, associate professor of French and Italian [7], said she is proudest of her article published in The Huffington Post titled, "Why Niger's Presidential Election Matters [8]," a piece about how the election can affect Niger’s democracy and, in turn, Islamic terrorism.

"I have increased the exposure of my ideas dramatically," Taoua said. "My op-eds get nearly 500 views in a couple of days, which is much more than what I get with publishing an academic article."

Other highlights from UA participants in this year’s group include:

- Shirin Antia, professor of disability and psychoeducational studies [9], wrote an op-ed calling for better education for children with disabilities, which appeared in The Huffington Post [10].
- Tricia Serio, department head and professor of molecular and cellular biology [11], co-authored an op-ed on the need to expand biomedical research, which appeared in U.S. News & World Report [12].
- Paloma Beamer, associate professor of community, environment and policy [13], published an op-ed on the lack of toxicity data, which appeared in The Hill [14].

The other UA participants involved are Ann Marie Chiasson, assistant director for the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine [15]; Kristine Huskey, professor of law [16]; Sofia Martinez Ramos, adjunct instructor of Mexican American studies [17]; Beth Mitchneck, professor in the School of Geography and Development [18]; and Krista Millay, assistant dean of students for advocacy, prevention education and gender justice.

Thirty-five of the published op-eds sparked additional media coverage of UA faculty members, including interviews and media appearances.

You can see more of the pieces this group has published here [19].

To learn more about this project and how to get involved, visit the OpEd Project [20] website.

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[2] https://web.sbs.arizona.edu/
[5] https://medium.com/@melanie.hingle/the-customer-is-not-always-right-6f5376982b51#.53xz1h12j
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