

## 2016/17 Community Engagement Fellow Project Report

John All, Huxley College of the Environment, WWU

### Project Title:

Developing a Mountain Research Skills Certificate for both students and community members through WWU Extended Education

### Project Overview:

This project links the outdoor recreation community and other interested stakeholders, agencies including the US Forest Service and Park Service, and local Tribes with the students and faculty of WWU through a proposed mountain skills certification program that prepares both students and interested community members for working safely and effectively in backcountry and especially mountainous environments. There is no other program like this in the United States. Given the local and global environmental changes that grow more evident everyday, there is an ever-growing need for people on the front lines of environmental conservation and research.

### Project Details:

During my Community Engagement Fellowship (CEF), I developed and refined a new WWU certificate for both WWU students and community members. This new certificate program will provide participants with an interdisciplinary background in research methodologies while also providing a core experience of expedition planning and backcountry safety. The certificate has been developed in coordination with a variety of community stakeholders so that it meets the needs of a broad constituency.

The program will begin with a background in conservation of biological diversity and ecosystem management. Program instructors will explain how to create outdoor programs and research projects. During the program, we will both teach the students safety and expedition skills directly and link them to the American Alpine Institute, the Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, and other groups to further develop specialized skills in outdoor medicine, avalanche safety, and search and rescue. The overall goal is to blend WWU academics and community outdoor expertise.

### Project Reflection:

People are attracted to WWU and Bellingham because of their love of our beautiful landscapes, but translating that affinity into professional and/or conservation outcomes is difficult. We want to understand and protect our lands, but are often don't know the best paths to do this – and so this certificate provides a broad set of knowledge for a diverse group of people to help them reach this goal.

I had initially intended the certificate to be very academically oriented, but after my first CEF meeting where we discussed our projects, the group's comments helped me realize that I needed to think more broadly. I was interested in a holistic, interdisciplinary research program, but during our discussions, it became clear that a focus on biodiversity and conservation outcomes rather than theory was critical. I had also intended to focus on mountain development – how communities can create sustainable lifestyles through permaculture techniques – but realized that it was too broad and too much for a single certificate. Perhaps this will develop into a new major in the future.

For now, I am moving through the curriculum process and the excitement from students is palpable. The Community Fellows program was critical in helping me develop a project that will reach a broad swath of stakeholders as well as students. I look forward to seeing this project come to fruition!