Expert Knowledge for the Public Good.
The Conversation U.S. at a Glance.

About

VISION
To be the most trusted news outlet for members of society to engage with scholarly ideas and analyses in the public interest.

MISSION
Academic expert knowledge for the public good.

SHARED VALUES
We are committed to following these values in everything we do:
- Integrity, Truth and Transparency
- Quality and Excellence
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Collaboration and Respect
- Impact and Innovation

Future
At a time when journalism and academia are under siege, The Conversation has ambitious plans to grow, and to strengthen both for the public good. In the next five years we will use our collaborative strength to democratize knowledge from thousands of more experts for millions of more people. We will deliver expert content in more ways and diversify our revenue so we exist for the long term.

Nine editions worldwide
- Australia (2011)
- UK (2013)
- U.S. (2014)
- Africa (2015)
- France (2015)
- Canada (2017)
- New Zealand (2017)
- Spain (2018)
- Indonesia (2018)

24 million users on our site per month

68 million reads per month including republication in other media

The Conversation U.S. is part of a global network dedicated to unlocking the knowledge of researchers and academics around the globe to provide the public with clarity and insight into society’s biggest problems.
By the Numbers

Pageviews through Creative Commons

Visits to The Conversation U.S. Website

Facebook Fans, Twitter Followers and Newsletter Subscribers

Academic Contributors By Year

By the Numbers

In 2018, we purged 15,737 newsletter subscribers for strict compliance with GDPR, the EU’s rules mandating explicit opt-in to email newsletters.

Member Institutions

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<tr>
<td>Founding Members as of 1/16</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutions as of end of FY 2020</td>
<td>61</td>
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<td>Institutions as of end of FY 2018</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>Institutions as of end of FY 2021</td>
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Includes readership on hundreds of websites under our Creative Commons license.
Looking Back and Ahead.

Beth Daley
Editor and General Manager

After decades reporting on research from academia at The Boston Globe and other news outlets, Beth is delighted to run an organization that helps academics translate their important work into journalism in the public interest.

Two and a half years ago, when I joined The Conversation U.S., I knew how important its singular form of journalism was amid the fading quality of public discourse.

But I had no idea how even more crucial it was about to become. The pandemic and the presidential election gave The Conversation U.S. and academia a unique opportunity to provide – sometimes within hours – critical information, explanatory journalism and analysis to hundreds of news outlets in all corners of the country, and world. Millions of people have turned to The Conversation in the past year for the latest research on SARS-CoV-2 and vaccines, fact-based election coverage, analyses of racial disparities and answers to the questions of curious kids.

It could not have been accomplished without the immense hard work of our staff, the commitment from our university partners – especially our founding members – and the generosity of our foundations and individual donors.

This report shines a light on our work especially in the last year. When we began, our staff was seven. Today it is 31. We have published more than 13,700 articles since we began and 2,287 in the last fiscal year. As always, a key piece of our nonprofit model is to give content away for free.

It also unveils a key tenet for The Conversation: to elevate the voices of diverse scholars.

The Conversation’s currency is experts. And these experts, armed with comprehensive and authoritative knowledge, hold enormous power with the media, policymakers and the public. By training scholars who are more representative of the U.S. public to write
accessible articles, we believe that trust in all experts will grow. The perspectives they bring will foster more authentic authority in science, health, politics, arts and other critical areas in society. This initiative is as important as the mission of launching The Conversation U.S. in 2014 to get more evidence- and fact-based information to the public at large.

We are also proud to be partnering for the first time with the American Association for the Advancement of Science to host media fellows; we have also started a formal internship program. We are equally focused on delivering our content in a multitude of formats and continue to grow and strengthen our revenue base so we are sustainable for the long term.

I can’t say thank you enough to readers, scholars, university partners, our deeply talented staff and everyone who makes the collaboration between academics and editors happen. I am particularly thankful to our current and former board and leadership, our founders and our international network.

I can’t wait to see what we accomplish in the next year together.

We are democratizing knowledge – and strengthening the flow of trustworthy, fact-based information to the public.”
Diversity & Inclusion.

One of the key principles of The Conversation U.S. is diversity and inclusion. Democratizing scholarly knowledge includes amplifying diverse voices and disseminating them broadly to all those who can benefit. It includes creating a welcoming environment for everyone internally. We strive to incorporate this ideal into everything we do, from our own staff to our editorial and business processes.

Within the past two years, The Conversation has worked to identify diverse candidates to fill open positions on our staff; as a result we have welcomed professionals of various ages, races, ethnicities, gender identities, religions, and sexual orientations. We have already started to reap benefits in the form of broader perspectives and fresh ideas on both the editorial and business sides of the organization.

One of the qualities that sets us apart from other news organizations is our close relationship with our academic partners. This creates a unique opportunity to ensure that diverse expert voices are being heard by the general public through our website, and by the close to 1,000 media outlets that use our content each year and the myriad of news organizations that look to us for experts.

Today, we are undertaking new initiatives to amplify the voices of scholars of color. This includes building a database of academics that can be easily used as a
resource by reporters and broadcast producers and the hiring of editors primarily focused on this effort. We are looking at ways we can reduce the structural barriers that keep scholars of color from writing for The Conversation.

We’re also working to bring our journalism to diverse communities. We give away all our content free under a Creative Commons license, an arrangement which is particularly useful to struggling ethnic media outlets looking for quality content. Our stories have been republished by African American media including Blavity.com, the Baltimore Afro-American and the Chicago Defender. We’ve reached religious media, such as Word & Way, Ministry Matters, St. Louis Jewish Light and The Forward. We have a pilot project to translate content into Spanish that has led to readership on Univision, Telemundo and Yahoo en Español.
Ernest Crowder has been managing finance and operations for The Conversation U.S. for four months. A graduate of the University of Missouri with degrees in political science and history, he has extensive management experience across a broad range of industries, from higher education to investigative journalism. He is a former vice president of the Better Government Association.

TCUS’ newest revenue stream continued to grow in FY21 – raising over $470,000 in donations from individuals during the year. Through the pandemic, we were able to maintain the same level of operating revenue from university memberships compared to previous years. Grants continue to make up about half of our financial support.

The critical factor in what makes The Conversation a unique and indispensable part of America’s media landscape is our people. Personnel costs take up the lion’s share of our budget – 80% of our total expenditures are on staff salaries and benefits. Other significant budget expenses are our license payments for TCUS’ technology platform and outside talent that helps us with special skills like accounting, marketing and fundraising. The pandemic affected our travel to conferences and universities, so only 1% of the budget was spent to cover these expenses.

Most of our expenses go toward recruiting, training and then editing, publishing and distributing the content of our academic writers. We spend smaller amounts on fundraising and on managing the business affairs of The Conversation.
I am here to report, as the Chief Innovation and Development Officer, that we have more than held our own during the past 16 months! Heading into March of 2020 we were expecting a continued steady growth pattern in the coming year – that is, until COVID hit.

Like most nonprofits, we experienced a tense few months. Universities predicted losing millions, foundations were shifting gears to crisis mode. However, we weathered the storm, thanks to the incredible partnerships we have with our member universities. We were able to hold on to almost all of our university members and, in addition, to allow five new members to join in the fall of 2020. This included our first HBCU member, the Morehouse School of Medicine, and Texas State University, a minority-serving Institution. We now count 62 supporting members contributing to our mission.

In the past year we have also received a number of new grants awarded to support our mission to democratize academic knowledge for the public good. This includes another exciting collaborative grant from the Lilly Endowment that is supporting The Associated Press, The Chronicle of Philanthropy and The Conversation to focus attention on charitable giving and philanthropy and its impact on society. We also received a first-time grant from the Spencer Foundation to support our education content.

During this time we ramped up our efforts to increase reader donations. We continue to be humbled and gratified by the countless number of readers willing to support our mission. We have more than tripled our donations since 2019, and these contributions provide us with stability and a diverse funding stream.

At the root of all of this success is the exceptional content being produced because of the partnerships between expert scholars and our experienced editors.

Our articles are now being republished monthly by more than 400 very diverse digital media sites from Yahoo! News and MSN to Scientific American and Fast Company, from The Washington Post and The Atlanta Journal-Constitution to Univision and Blavity. On top of that, we are republished in a print newspaper monthly from almost every state in the U.S. This is due to The Associated Press continuing to make our content available in its daily news feed, which contributes to our incredibly diverse readership. We are now averaging over 20 million readers per month – up from 8 million in January of 2020.

One other very important development is the launching of our Diversity Initiative, which you will read more about in this report. This is thanks to an initial grant from the Burroughs Wellcome Fund to raise the voices of scholars of color in the biomedical and STEM fields; and the Lumina Foundation has now added to the efforts. We are actively working with our member institutions and other foundations to increase the funding of this critically important initiative across all disciplines. We aim to change the way the public gets access to experts. Bringing inclusive perspectives to the public is so important, and we believe we can make a difference.

The Conversation is going to continue to thrive, and it is thanks to all our stakeholders – the universities, foundations and, of course, the readers who believe that trusted journalism is paramount to a functioning democracy. We appreciate every single one of you!

Cheers – Bruce
Academic Institution Members.

The Conversation U.S. now has 62 members. While a researcher at any university can write for The Conversation, member universities receive special benefits.

Founding Members

- Binghamton University
- Boston University
- University of California
- University of Florida
- Georgia State University
- UMass Amherst
- Michigan State University
- University of Michigan
- The Ohio State University
- Penn State
- Rutgers University
- University of South Florida
- Texas A&M University
- Tufts University
- Vanderbilt University
Supporting Members
Why I Write for The Conversation.

Shahzeen Attari, Associate Professor of Public and Environmental Affairs
Indiana University

“The clarity and connections your editors brought to our essay has helped make our research relevant and accessible to a very different and much larger audience. There is wonderful storytelling that a great editor brings to work, and it rarely goes acknowledged. So here is a heartfelt ‘thank you!’ The graphic you and your team made was also superb.”

Rebecca Janzen, Assistant Professor of Spanish & Comparative Literature
University of South Carolina

“Working with The Conversation helped me summarize years of academic research into a succinct article that was understandable for most readers. It also led to republication by several outlets and opportunities to work with other media, including an appearance on the Spanish-language television network Univisión. One of my goals is to share my research with people who are not academics and to have it help them in some way. Articles in The Conversation have allowed me to do that.”

Darryl Scriven, Ph.D., Dean, School of Arts and Sciences
Clarkson University

“Our piece in The Conversation allowed a dean and a provost with different business experiences to discuss entrepreneurship with a combined voice. Often academics don’t take time to connect on the practical things we have in common. As enriching as we hope the article was to readers, writing this essay gifted us a conversation with each other that continues to be fruitful.”

Robin Queen, Arthur F. Thurnau Professor and Professor of Linguistics, English Language and Literatures and Germanic Languages and Literatures
University of Michigan

“The pieces I’ve written for The Conversation have helped dispel myths about language and highlighted the role of language in matters of discrimination and social equity. Each has garnered more than 200,000 page views and multiple opportunities to speak with the national press. One piece even showed up as a question on Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me (NPR). The writing process was seamless, informative and fast. It’s a nice blend of journalism, academic writing and conversation.”
Davide Tanasi, PhD, Associate Professor of Digital Humanities & Director of the Institute for Digital Exploration  
University of South Florida

“The feedback I received from publishing with The Conversation was extremely beneficial for my academic career, expanding my network of contacts, bringing my research to the attention of international groups and giving me critical exposure in the media. I warmly recommend it to anyone charged with public dissemination and popularization of research. I am already at work on another pitch.”

April D. Thames, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry  
University of Southern California

“I had the opportunity to write two pieces for The Conversation. I found the platform easy to use, and it was informative to view impact metrics of how many readers viewed the story, how many media outlets picked up the story, the number of story tweets and Facebook shares. I would highly recommend The Conversation for anyone who is interested in reaching a wider audience.”

Rodolfo Galvan Estrada, Ph.D., Miranda Center Assistant Professor of the New Testament  
Vanguard University

“I really appreciate the careful attention the editors gave to reviewing my research. I kept thinking to myself, how can a nonacademic understand the benefits of my research? This approach to writing really stimulated new ways of crafting my article. The ability to reach people in a variety of ways really gave me a sense that my research meant something, that people were interested, and that it could make a difference. The entire process, from being introduced to what The Conversation is about, then to generating the pitch, and then writing and reviewing the article, was such a wonderful experience. I am so grateful to have written for The Conversation.”

Julie Pollock, Associate Professor of Chemistry  
University of Richmond

“I’ve authored three articles for The Conversation over the past two years. Each article has resulted in pickups in dozens of additional publications, including Scientific American, which is a holy grail-type publication for many science faculty. I enjoy writing for The Conversation because it enables the education of the general public on important scientific information; plus, I can link in the work of my research lab. It’s a win-win!”
Providing Trustworthy Information.

While social media is notorious for providing a platform for misinformation, The Conversation’s articles written by genuine experts are being increasingly shared.
Republication and Audience Engagement.

Joel Abrams
Director of Digital Strategy and Outreach

Joel ran social media strategy and launched vertical sites on Catholicism and technology for The Boston Globe. A widely respected online journalist, he has also worked in product management and editorial positions at The Christian Science Monitor, Lycos and CNN International.

Reaching our Audience

The COVID-19 pandemic pointed out the urgent need for research-based information, and readership of The Conversation soared, both on TheConversation.com and across the internet. Millions of readers were introduced to the work we do through republishers, search engines and apps.

Because we give our content away under a Creative Commons license, thousands of websites and printed news publications were able to give their readers our articles for free. We surveyed the editors who use our articles and they describe our work as trustworthy, relevant, timely, authoritative and helpful in educating their readers about complex issues. Over 95% would recommend to other editors that they republish from The Conversation.

Our model is win-win for news organizations: We produce quality content that helps academia reach the public, and by doing that we strengthen struggling media outlets. We reach readers of the printed Punxsutawney (PA) Spirit, the Kitsap (WA) Sun and the Birmingham (AL) News. Some of the best-known and most prestigious news brands, such as PBS, CNN and the Washington Post, republish our articles, as do small local sites, such as Nancy on Norwalk (CT), YubaNet (Nevada City, CA) and the016.com (Worcester, MA).

Our articles are also picked up by a huge diversity of online sites, across the ideological spectrum, from the young readers of Mic to the retired readers of Considerable, from the African American readers of Blavity to the ecologically minded readers of EcoWatch to the honey-making readers of Bee Culture. The words of The Conversation U.S. are reaching farms and suburbs, homeless shelters and people of influence.

Our ability to reach publishers grew with the addition of Katrina Aman as journalism evangelist.

We reached increasing numbers of people and new audiences on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and TikTok. You can see some posts from influencers on the previous page.

The Conversation U.S. • 2021 Annual Report

Joel Abrams
Director of Digital Strategy and Outreach
Our email newsletters serve our most loyal readers and are a strategic channel for distributing our content. In the digital media world, it’s the equivalent of putting out a newspaper every day – without ink getting on readers’ fingers. Our flagship daily newsletter, which is delivered in the morning six days a week, has grown substantially as more people have discovered us and topped 100,000 subscribers by 2021.

Starting in early 2020 we started to expand with new weekly newsletters and experiment with limited-run newsletters. First up was a weekly science newsletter, which I continue to write, that provides readers with a curated selection of the top science-related Conversation stories. Then came a Sunday edition with the most popular stories on site, and as election season was heating up in the fall of 2020, we launched the Politics Weekly newsletter. All told, we publish 10 newsletters a week.

In early 2021, I transitioned from my previous role as Deputy Editor (starting way back in January 2015!) to head up newsletters and editorial projects. My first major task was developing a newsletter to distribute religion articles produced through our partnership with The Associated Press and the Religion News Service. This Week in Religion launched in April 2021 and I’m proud of the newsletter’s clean design, which showcases the breadth of coverage and AP’s world-class photography.

We’ve also experimented with what are called newsletter “mini courses,” a series of emails delivered over a few days or weeks that go in depth on a particular subject. The first was a five-email course on the 2020 census, and in June 2021 (Pride Month) we launched an email newsletter course on transgender youth and the issues they and their families face.

Newsletters are an excellent way to bring attention to the work we do on special series and projects. Project teams have worked on major stories that have played out over months – the biggest being the 2020 election and the pandemic. We’ve also had teams go deep on issues that are under-covered in the rest of the media, such as the health of the global oceans, hunger in the U.S. and tick-borne diseases. In each case, we bring an interdisciplinary approach that gives our readers and republishers a better understanding of issues in the public interest.

Some projects have been global in nature, with editors in the U.S. collaborating with colleagues at editions of The Conversation around the world. And we’ve worked with other news organizations. One collaboration led by the Institute for Nonprofit News on the effects of climate change in the Great Lakes areas won an award from the Society of Professional Journalists’ Detroit chapter.

In the coming year, I see newsletters as a key way to deepen our relationship with our core audience and attract more people to read, listen or view the outstanding content our team produces.
A message from the Managing Editor.

Emily Costello
Managing Editor

Emily has worked in all types of media – from mass market fiction to kids’ science magazines to local news. Her passions are supporting endangered newsrooms and adding new voices to the public debate.

When I started at the Conversation in 2015, our little band of editors spent a lot of time on the phone explaining to scholars who we were and why they were so important to our mission.

By 2019, those kinds of conversations were rarely necessary. The work we had done as a scrappy startup was starting to pay rewards — with many scholars eager to work with us and taking the initiative to reach out with their story ideas. During 2019 to 2020, we received 9,677 story ideas from scholars.

This growth was made possible by an early decision from editorial leadership to create content of the highest possible quality. That decision has helped us to attract not only contributors, but republishing partners, funders and readers. Since taking on the role of managing editor in March 2021, I’m making sure to bake that commitment into every part of our editorial process. I know it’s an important part of our success and what makes our newsroom a fantastic place to work today with some of the most skilled and talented editors I’ve had the pleasure to ever know.

Our team — no longer so small — edits with a focus on what readers need to know, not on maximizing clicks. It’s a pleasure and an honor to work side-by-side daily with some of the brightest minds in the academy — true experts who give their time and attention to help the public understand the important news of the day. And it’s so exciting to find new voices and different perspectives to add to the public discourse.

We’re proud of what we’ve accomplished, but we’re always looking for ways to improve. If you have ideas, I’d welcome your feedback at emily.costello@theconversation.com.

On the next four pages, you’ll find just a few highlights of our output during 2019 to 2020, including the stories that dominated all of desks in the newsroom and combined in important and unexpected ways — the pandemic, the racial reckoning, the 2020 election and climate change. While we devoted much of our attention to these important stories reshaping our society, we also kept an steadfast eye out for ideas that surprise and spark curiosity.

I hope you found both vital information — and a bit of an escape — in the stories we published.
2020 and 2021 were a time of challenge and achievement in our newsroom.

Coronavirus

The coronavirus first appeared in our health coverage with five stories in January 2020. After the WHO declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020, the story exploded – affecting the American economy, businesses, educational systems, electoral politics, religious life and culture in profound ways that we worked to explain as the crisis unfolded around us.

Much of our health coverage focused on consumer-oriented “news you could use” during a time when good information could literally save lives. We also worked to cover real-time research on the SARS-CoV-2 virus, its emerging variants and a historic effort to develop and test vaccines against it. Doctors wrote us dispatches from overstretched hospitals, and we published a first-person account from an African American epidemiologist who suffered from “long-haul” coronavirus. We wrote about how the virus was changing how Americans worshipped and grieved; offered parents tips on helping their children learn on Zoom; and covered the biggest spike in unemployment in modern American history.

While covering the pandemic, our editors frequently expressed such ideas as: “This was the hardest story I’ve ever had to cover” or “This is the biggest challenge of my career.” Yet that challenge was also an opportunity to prove our value and gain new audiences by providing evidence-based journalism without bias.

I’m incredibly proud of how our newsroom performed during this period of intense personal stress as editors transitioned to working from home during the lockdowns, many caring for children as schools shuttered. We were living the story as we covered it.

Our scholars explored the extent of health care disparities related to the virus, the reasons minority communities suffered more disease and higher death rates.
Racial Reckoning

Then came 9 minutes and 29 seconds that brought a second urgent focus to our coverage – that of racial justice. As protests spread throughout the nation, we covered George Floyd’s death and the consequent protests across America, profiled Milwaukee and explored which ideas for reforming policing had the most success.

STORY HIGHLIGHT:
Politics+Society

“American cities have long struggled to reform their police – but isolated success stories suggest community and officer buy-in might be key”

By Thaddeus L. Johnson and Natasha N. Johnson of Georgia State University
(15,465 pageviews)
2020 Election

Leading up to the election, the politics desk produced more than 100 articles that explained how the American electoral system works – and sometimes doesn’t. A special election project team created a plan for reporting the election results and really worked their breaking-news muscles to cover unfolding events, including the election results in Georgia, the siege of the Capitol and the impeachment trial.

STORY HIGHLIGHT: Ethics+Religion

“A scholar of American anti-Semitism explains the hate symbols present during the US Capitol riot”

By Jonathan D. Sarna of Brandeis University

(278,421 pageviews)

STORY HIGHLIGHT: Philanthropy+Nonprofits

“Millions of American parents will soon get a monthly allowance: 4 questions answered”

By Joya Misra, University of Massachusetts Amherst

(98,988 pageviews)

STORY HIGHLIGHT: Politics+Society

“So-called ‘Latino vote’ is 32 million Americans with diverse political opinions and national origins”

By Lisa García Bedolla of UC Berkeley

(9,727 pageviews)

The Environment

The environment continued as an important focus. We published stories that helped explain how human activities hasten the development of zoonotic diseases, the growing impact of wildfire and the health of the world’s oceans and fisheries.

STORY HIGHLIGHT: Environment+Energy

“Warming is clearly visible in new US ‘climate normal’ datasets”

By Russ Schumacher and Becky Bolinger of Colorado State University

(279,516 pageviews)
STAGE 1: Research-based ideas
A scholar pitches The Conversation with an idea based on their research (or an editor reaches out to an expert. The editor commissions a story with specific instructions.

STAGE 2: Collaboration between scholar and editor
The scholar writes the article and the editor coaches them on writing for the public. They go through a rigorous editorial process of revision to make sure the ideas are clearly expressed. The scholar gives final approval that the article accurately reflects their research.

STAGE 3: Article is published
The article is published on TheConversation.com, gets featured in The Conversation’s newsletter and social media, goes out on the AP wire, and is highlighted in alerts to republishers.

STAGE 4: Expert knowledge reaches the public
The Conversation publishes stories through a Creative Commons license that allows any outlet to republish them with proper attribution. Last year 696 outlets picked up our stories. A small sampling:

The logos are trademarks of their respective organizations.
Board of Trustees.

The Conversation U.S. benefits from the guidance and engagement of its Trustees, who bring a wealth of insight and wisdom based on their diverse professional and life experiences to their stewardship of our organization.
Foundations.

We are grateful to the foundations that support The Conversation U.S. and who have made our work possible. They support our editorial independence and have no access to our editorial process or decision-making.
The Conversation Staff.

**Leadership**

Beth Daley  
Editor + General Manager

Bruce Wilson  
Chief Innovation + Development Officer

**Editorial**

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Education Editor

Alvin Buyinza  
Editorial + Outreach Assistant

Emily Costello  
Managing Editor

Jeff Inglis  
Politics + Society Editor

Kalpana Jain  
Senior Religion + Ethics Editor

Bryan Keogh  
Senior Economics + Business Editor

Martin La Monica  
Director of Editorial Projects + Newsletters

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Assistant Health + Biomedicine Editor

Nick Lehr  
Arts + Culture Editor

Julie Lipkin  
Copy Editor

Amanda Mascarelli  
Health + Medicine Editor

Daniel Merino  
Assistant Science Editor + Co-Host of The Conversation Weekly Podcast

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Environment + Climate Editor

Naomi Schalit  
Senior Politics + Society Editor

Emily Schwartz Greco  
Philanthropy + Nonprofits Editor

Eric Smalley  
Science + Technology Editor
Editorial

Maggie Villiger  
Senior Science + Technology Editor

Jennifer Weeks  
Senior Environment + Energy Editor

Matt Williams  
Breaking News Editor

Finance & Administration

Sumalita Bhuyan  
HR Manager

Ernest Crowder  
Director of Finance + Administration

Anissa Cooke-Batista  
Marketing Communications + Events Manager

Marketing & Events

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Katrina Aman  
Journalism Evangelist

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Michelle McAdams  
University Relations Manager + Internship Manager

Hannah Sussman  
University Relations + Development Assoc.

Eric Zack  
Director, University Relations
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