

2010 Faculty Excellence

EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD



Lisa Nugent
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Cameron Wake

Research Associate Professor of Earth, Oceans, and Space COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES

Cameron Wake began his research career using ice cores recovered from the Himalaya, Tibetan Plateau, and the Arctic to look at big-picture climate change. But over time he realized that picture he was seeing was too large for most people to fathom, let alone act upon.

“As I learned more about human drivers of climate change in the late 1980s and ‘90s I became very concerned about what I saw as a lack of action on society’s part,” Wake recalls. “On numerous occasions, I told people that if policymakers and the general public knew what I knew—that climate change is a significant threat to our quality of life—they would act differently.”

So, at risk to his research career, Wake shifted gears in an effort to help alter the collective consciousness. He brought his focus down to regional-scale climate change, and began putting more time and energy into becoming a translator of science. Today, Wake is well known as an accomplished practitioner of “engaged scholarship,” a process in which university faculty members collaborate with external partners on mutually beneficial projects to create and generate knowledge that is

of practical use to society at large.

“For the most part, universities are focused on disciplines and society is focused on problems,” says Wake. “If universities are to stay relevant they must also focus on helping solve society’s problems.”

Tom Kelly, UNH’s chief sustainability officer, has worked with Wake for a dozen years and praises the wide range of public service to which Wake has applied his expertise in climate science, including projects directly serving the

University community. “Cameron’s commitment to sharing his research with the larger community, especially decision-makers at the state, regional, and federal levels, is laudable. He is a real leader in the new movement of engaged scholarship for sustainability,” says Kelly.

Wake says that the University’s endowed sustainability program and its nationally recognized Engaged Scholars Academy have played a major role in helping him pursue his engaged scholarship work, which, he stresses, is at its core all about sustainability. “Today’s big, societal questions revolve around the issue of sustainability, which I would define as being the big picture.”

~David Sims

