

Featured Affiliate

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Why did you decide to start an AWIS affiliate group?

In 2015, graduate students Jessica Burnett, Hannah Birgé, and Johnica Morrow sought to build a group within the School of Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln that would provide support for underrepresented groups in the natural resource sciences. Professors Mary Bomberger Brown and Jenny Dauer, with support from the School's administration (Director John Carroll) and post-doctoral researchers Heather Bergan-Roller, Devarati Bhattacharya, and Amanda Sorensen, agreed to serve as faculty leads, and our affiliate Association for Women in Science group was formed.

Simultaneous efforts to support women and underrepresented groups around campus were springing up at the same time in several of the STEM departments. When our group realized what was happening, we decided pursuing a university-wide group with an AWIS affiliation would be the most impactful step forward to amplifying our purpose, but also for instigating real and meaningful change across the campus. AWIS would provide a resource base of methods and materials to help in bringing this change.

Response to pursuing an AWIS membership from university-level leadership was positive and quick. The Office of Research and Economic Development and the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor took the lead in establishing our institutional affiliation with the national AWIS organization for the benefit of faculty and students at Nebraska, and a 13-member steering committee now leads the university's AWIS activities, with the eventual goal of satellite groups across the campus.

What do you hope to achieve through this work?

Ultimately, we want barriers facing women and underrepresented groups from entering STEM fields to dissolve at Nebraska. We also want to:

- Identify, develop, and support female leaders, bringing them to decision-making platforms and promoting them in governance;
- Create opportunities for hiring more women and those from other underrepresented groups in university departments and in faculty positions;

- Provide professional advancement opportunities through workshops, mentorships, and interdisciplinary collaborations; and
- Develop better communication among members through internal newsletters, listservs, and social media streams.

The mission statement of the campus-wide AWIS group is: Create campus culture to increase participation and impact of women in all areas of STEM at all levels in the academy and the broader scientific community.

How do you capitalize on technology to promote your work in this space?

We are using the communication networks and channels already in place to distribute news, achievements, and progress to the university community and beyond. Those channels include social media streams, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram; websites; and broadly distributed newsletters and press releases. We include the hashtag #AWISatNEBRASKA in our social media streams.

As our group continues to grow into a broader, more diverse group, we will continue to focus our efforts on inter- and intra-departmental communications and team building, likely through a master listserv; on broader awareness, through social media streams and the use of well-developed identity-building hashtags (i.e., #AWISatNEBRASKA); and through our department- and university-level calendars. Communicators within the Office of Research and Economic Development, the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor, and elsewhere on campus will help us strategize on how to build and maintain our online presence and they will play a lead role in our distribution efforts. 🌱

Featured Affiliate

University of Colorado Boulder

Why did you decide to start an AWIS affiliate group?

A group of women in science and engineering at the University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) connected in August 2014. The decision to join the AWIS network and become an official AWIS Affiliate Group came about a year after we formed our initial group. In that year, we had grown from 20 to 200 members, which made us realize that there was a pressing need for women at CU Boulder to connect to others in STEM fields. By becoming an AWIS Affiliate Group, we wanted to gain more exposure and recognition on the CU Boulder campus, as well as to become connected to resources and other groups across the country through the AWIS network.

What do you hope to achieve through this work?

We have multiple goals in our programming at the CU Boulder. First, we hope to create a supportive community for women in STEM fields. Our organization reaches across many departments and institutes and provides a venue for women to connect with each other and share in their challenges and successes. Second, we hope to provide resources and training to increase the retention and success of female scientists throughout their career. Many of our seminars are focused on offering career advice—topics range from how to become a better public speaker, to how to write an effective resume, to the issues surrounding starting a family in academia. We also run a coaching program that pairs female graduate students with mentors in the professional world (academia and industry). Our third goal is to increase the visibility of women in STEM and inspire younger generations to consider a career in the sciences. We help organize K-12 outreach events throughout the year, and highlight the success of our community members at a Science Communication Symposium each spring, which has broad attendance from across the university.



left to right: Sarah Crump, President; Hayley Sohn, Secretary; Katia Tarasava, Vice President.

How do you capitalize on technology to promote your work in this space?

The CU Boulder AWIS team has an active online presence that allows us to increase our reach beyond the attendees of our events. Our website includes up-to-date information on events and opportunities, as well as blog posts spotlighting individuals' research or work. We have vibrant social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, with our networks continually growing. Our Facebook and Twitter feeds allow us to not only promote our own campus events, but to also share other groups' related events and news items that are of interest to our community. We recently started a weekly "Scientist Selfie" series on Instagram, which allows us to increase the visibility of women scientists at work. Additionally, our primary communications (including a once-a-semester newsletter) occur via our email list, which currently reaches over 400 campus members. 📧